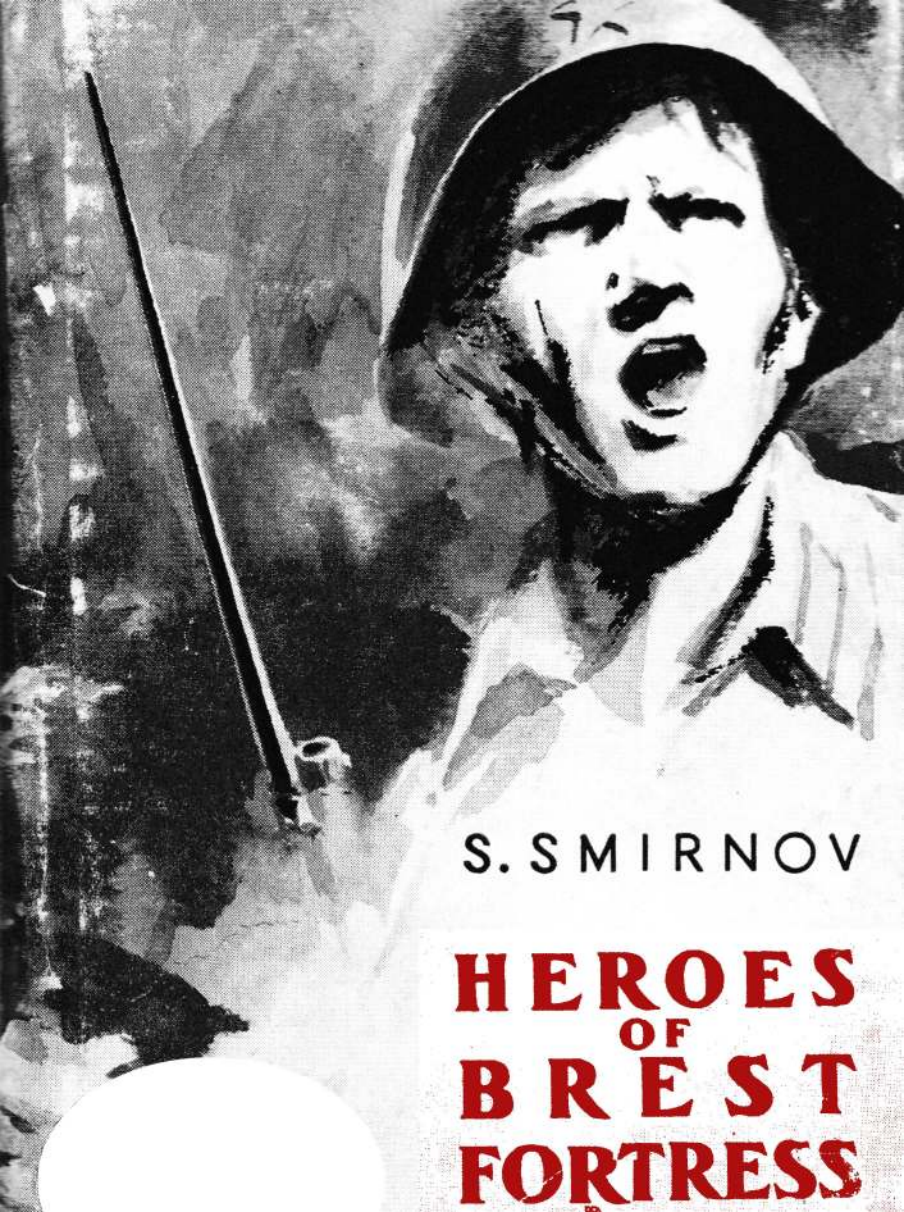
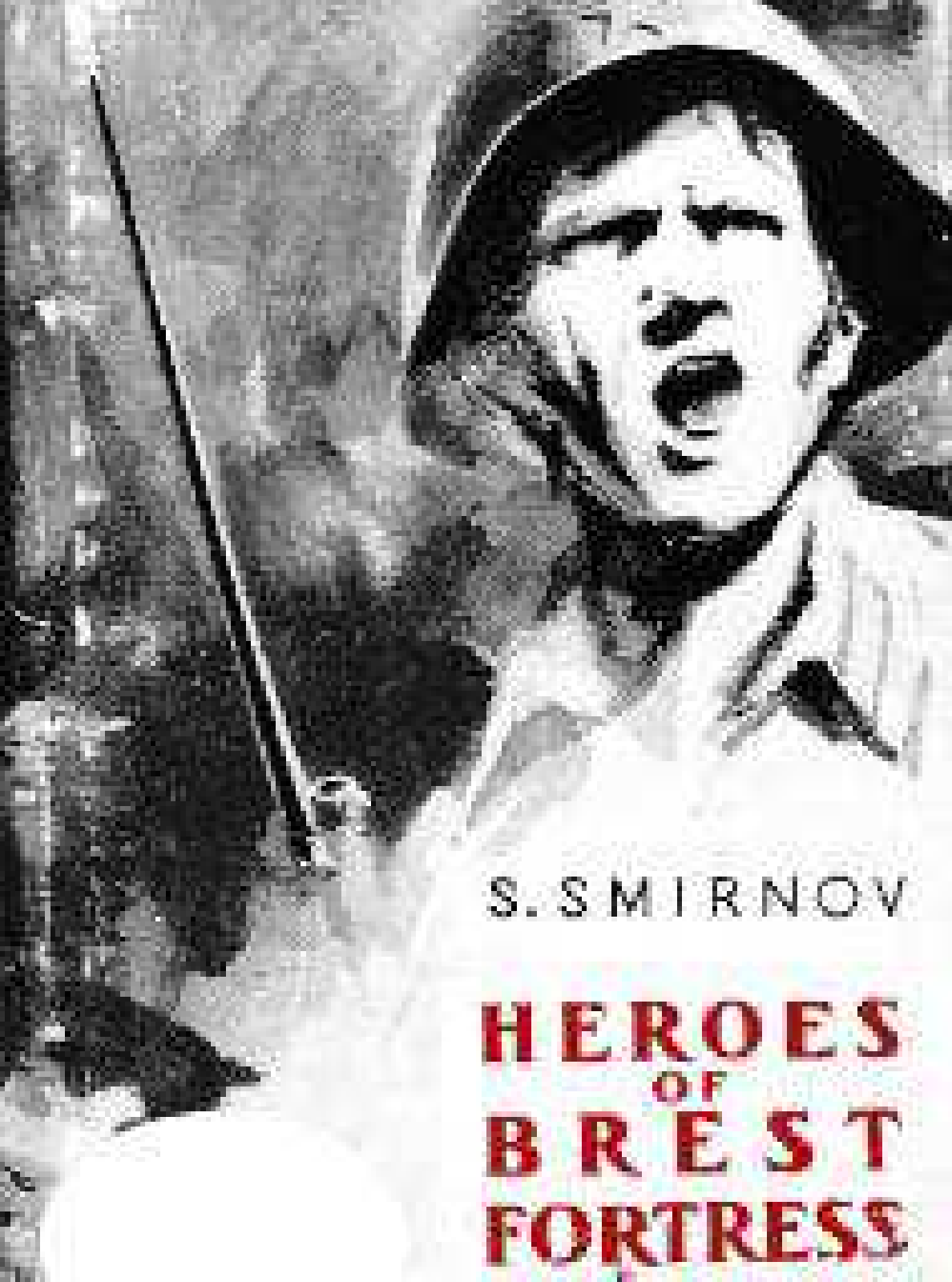


S. SMIRNOV

HEROES OF BREST FORTRESS



S. SMIRNOV

HEROES OF BREST FORTRESS

On the frontier, a mile and a half from Brest stands an old Russian fortress.

Before the Great Patriotic War it was used mainly as a barracks and a supply base. On the night of June 22, 1941 the fortress was manned by only a small garrison, all the main units were in training camps for the summer. Thanks to their numerical superiority and the advantage gained by a surprise attack, the Germans quickly overran Brest and advanced into the hinterland.

But some weeks after the outbreak of war rumours began to penetrate the front-line that far back in the enemy rear the heroic garrison of Brest Fortress was still fighting. The rumours were brought by officers

SERGEI SMIRNOV

HEROES OF BREST FORTRESS

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WAR!

Just before dawn on June 22, 1941, the men of the patrols and outposts guarding the western frontiers of the Soviet Union noticed something unusual about the sky. Strange stars had appeared far away beyond the frontier over the Nazi-ravaged lands of Poland, on the dim horizon in the west. Among the paling stars of the shortest summer night they were unusually bright, and of different colours, green and red, and they were moving slowly and steadily eastwards, threading their way through the fading galaxies of the night. Soon they were scattered over the whole western horizon and with them from the west came the steadily increasing roar of many engines.

The noise grew louder and louder until it seemed to fill the air, and at length the little col-

oured lights cut the invisible line of the air frontier and floated over the very heads of the frontier guards. Hundreds of German aircraft with flying lights on had invaded the skies of the Soviet Union.

And before the anxiously watching frontier guards could grasp the full meaning of this presumptuous act, the dawn shadows in the west were slashed by a series of lightning-like flashes, black columns of earth spouted up over the first yards of Soviet territory, and the earth and sky for miles round vibrated with a terrible, earsplitting roar. Thousands of German guns and mortars, secretly concentrated near the frontier in the past few days, opened fire on the Soviet frontier zone, and the usually alertly peaceful border of the state was in a few seconds converted into a thundering, blazing front-line.

Thus began Hitler Germany's treacherous attack on the Soviet Union, thus began the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet people against the German fascist invaders.

That morning military operations began simultaneously along the whole immense western frontier of the U.S.S.R., stretching for nearly three thousand miles from the Barents to the Black Sea. After intense artillery and air bombardment of the frontier zone over two hundred German, Finnish and Rumanian divisions

launched their offensive against Soviet territory in accordance with the so-called Barbarossa plan prepared by Hitler's generals.

Three powerful German army groups advanced eastwards. In the north, Field-Marshal von Leeb struck with his forces along the Baltic coast towards Leningrad. In the south, Field-Marshal Rundstedt aimed his forces at Kiev. But the most powerful enemy formation developed its operations in the centre of the huge front, where from the frontier town of Brest a broad macadamed highway runs eastwards through Minsk, capital of Byelorussia, through the ancient Russian city of Smolensk, through Vyazma and Mozhaisk, to the very heart of the country—to Moscow.

Field-Marshal von Bock, who was in command of the Central Army Group, had at his disposal over fifty divisions, as well as two powerful armoured groups commanded by generals Guderian and Gott. Like heavy battering-rams, these two tank masses were to pierce the Soviet defences north and south of Brest, penetrate deep into the Soviet rear, and in a broad encircling movement converge on Minsk, thus cutting off, and trapping in a ring of steel, the Soviet divisions disposed in the frontier areas between Minsk and Brest. The aim that the German High Command set before the Central Army Group was

to encircle and destroy the main mass of Soviet forces while they were still on the right bank of the Dnieper. Then was to come a fresh thrust at Smolensk, and on to Moscow. The enemy calculated that before the Soviet command could mobilize and transfer fresh divisions to the front to replace those that had been destroyed in the fighting for the Dnieper, German tanks would enter Moscow and thus decide the outcome of the struggle on the Soviet-German front.

The German generals, still undefeated after two years of war, and flushed with their recent successes in the Balkans, were confident that their eastern campaign would end in no less rapid and conclusive victory. Every stage in the campaign had been planned according to a time-table, and at their eve-of-war banquets the officers drank to the victory parade that was to be held four weeks later in the Red Square.

The early days of the war seemed to justify the self-confidence of the German generals. Events at the front developed perfectly for Hitler's armies. The initial attack came as a complete surprise and the Soviet forces in the frontier zones were caught unawares by the sudden blow in the night. In the first few hours the German air force was able to destroy a considerable number of Soviet tanks and aircraft before they

could be brought into action. The enemy was thus assured complete air superiority and the German bombers constantly harassed withdrawing columns of Soviet troops, bombing ammunition dumps and fuel stores, towns and railway junctions, while fast Messerschmitt fighters scoured the country roads in pursuit of small groups of soldiers, and even individual refugees making their way east.

Everything appeared to be going according to the plan worked out by the German High Command. As planned, the tanks of Guderian and Gott met at Minsk on June 27; the capital of Byelorussia was captured and part of the Soviet forces surrounded. Three weeks later, on July 16, advance units of the German army entered Smolensk. In fierce rear actions retreating Soviet troops became encircled and suffered severe losses, and the front rolled further and further east. The Berlin newspapers were already blowing a fanfare for victory, claiming that the Soviet Army was destroyed and predicting that the German armies would soon be in Moscow.

But even in those very early days of the war something unforeseen began to intervene in the plans of the German High Command, something that gave the more far-sighted German officers food for thought. The war in the East had turned

out to be quite unlike the war in the West. Here the opposing forces were of a different kind, and their conduct upset all the usual conceptions of the Nazi military leaders and their men.

It started right from the frontier. Though taken by surprise, with the greater part of their armaments and equipment destroyed by an extremely powerful and numerically superior opponent, the Soviet forces resisted with amazing stubbornness, and even small enemy victories had to be bought at far too great a cost. Cut off from the main forces, the dismembered Soviet units, contrary to all the laws of German military science, continued to put up a fierce and desperate resistance. Even small groups that were left scattered deep in the rear of the enemy, and that should by rights have been doomed to destruction, refused to give up their arms, made their way east through wild forests and marshes, boldly attacked transports and small enemy units on the roads, fought their way across the front-line and rejoined the main forces. Others that remained in the enemy's rear formed themselves into armed detachments and began a fierce partisan struggle, in which the population of the occupied territories took an ever increasing part.

And at the front, too, as the days went on, the resistance of the Soviet Army strengthened,

and after overcoming stubborn rear-guard actions in the western districts of Byelorussia and on the Berezina, the enemy had to face the Soviet forces' first powerful counter-blows in the prolonged and bloody battle for Smolensk. Together with the victories, together with the huge expanses of Soviet territory that had been captured, and the German army's rapid penetration into the depths of Russia, came the menacing figures of the enormous losses suffered by the German troops in these first battles, figures that had never been foreseen in the plans of the Nazi High Command.

And another strange and inexplicable thing astonished and bewildered the enemy leaders. In all their western campaigns, the enemy on the other side of the front had been weakened and disorganized by retreat, and only a few blows were needed to administer final defeat.

But in Russia it was different. True, on the other side of the line there was also a retreating, unsuccessful army, but unlike previous campaigns in the West, the strength of this army, far from diminishing, actually increased the further it retreated into the depths of the country. And the area behind the German front could certainly not be considered conquered or submissive. In a sense, that huge expanse of territory was also a battle-field, for in every part of it there

was armed conflict, sometimes open, sometimes concealed, but always unusually bitter and stubborn. Soviet army units breaking out of encirclement were fighting; hundreds of thousands of small groups forcing their way through the enemy's rear were fighting. And already a terrible and indestructible force was growing up in the dense forests and impenetrable marshes of Byelorussia, a force that was to prove fatal to the invaders—the nation-wide partisan movement led by the underground organizations of the Communist Party.

The front existed wherever the invaders set foot. It extended for hundreds of miles in depth, from the forward patrols of the Nazi armies right back to the frontier of the U.S.S.R. The mighty wave of the German invasion that had poured over the frontier on June 22 had been unable to sweep away that invisible border-line, and it could not be trampled out of existence by the tracks of German tanks, nor by millions of soldiers' boots. Everywhere along the frontier, encircled groups of frontier guards, army units, whole outposts, the garrisons of isolated frontier strong-points continued to wage war. In the Brest area the desperate and unequal struggle on various sectors of the frontier continued for several days before the enemy succeeded in crushing these centres of resistance.

But even after that, on the bank of the Western Bug there was a point where the fighting still continued with unheard-of ferocity, where a handful of Soviet fighting men, gripped in a ring of fire, surrounded by enemy forces that outnumbered them by ten to one, defended the first yards of our native land with a determination and vigour that even the enemy was forced to acknowledge.

They were still fighting when German tanks entered Minsk, they proudly refused the enemy's offer of surrender when the front moved on to the Berezina. Incredible though it seems, a whole month after the outbreak of war, when the forward units of the German army had passed Smolensk, the last groups of Soviet fighting men, tortured with hunger and thirst, slowly bleeding to death, still had not laid down their arms and were continuing this amazing and unprecedented struggle.

These legendary heroes who wrote one of the first and most glorious pages in the history of the Great Patriotic War were the officers and men of the small Soviet garrison that on June 22, 1941, was stationed in an old Russian fortress that stands near the town of Brest, on the very frontier of the U.S.S.R.

THE OLD FORTRESS

In ancient times, on the birch-covered slopes below which the little river Mukhavets flows into the Western Bug, a Slav settlement arose called Berestye. Subsequently, this settlement grew up into a fortified town of some importance, which, as it was first under the power of Lithuania, then of Poland, came to be called Brest, or Brest-Litovsk.

A fortress town, the constant object of struggle between three powerful neighbouring states, Russia, Poland and Lithuania—such was the history of Brest for centuries. Many a time foreign invaders appeared under its walls, and more than once the town was sacked and destroyed, and its citizens put to the sword.

At the end of the 18th century these lands once again became part of Russia. After the war of 1812 the tsarist government decided to turn Brest into one of the chief strongholds of the Russian Army in the western districts of the country. And so over a century ago the fortress of Brest arose at the junction of the Mukhavets and the Bug.

Skilfully exploiting the advantages of the terrain, Russian military engineers built fortifications that for those days were indeed impregnable. A massive earthen wall over thirty feet high

Kholmsky Gate of Brest Fortress

surrounded the fortress territory on all sides, extending for a distance of about five miles. In the thickness of the earthworks there were storehouses that could hold supplies sufficient for a

Rhodesian Girls at Boat Parade

surrounded the native territory on all sides, extending for a distance of about five miles. In the Highlands of the northwest there were some areas that could hold supplies sufficient for a

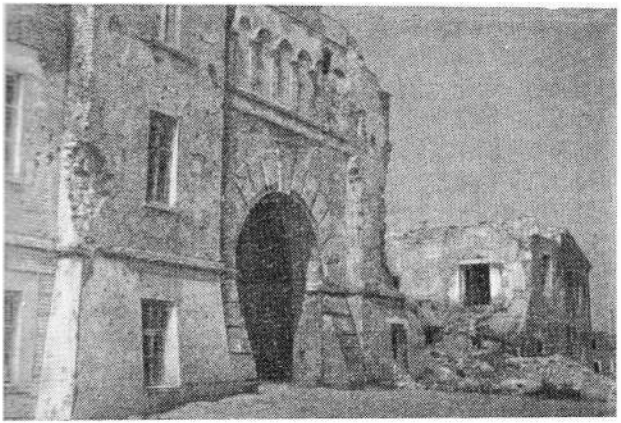
whole army. Where the earthworks did not run along the banks of the river, broad moats had been dug and flooded with the waters of the Bug and Mukhavets. Combined with the natural channels of the rivers, these moats formed four islands, four fortified blocks, which together made up the Fortress of Brest.

Just before joining the Bug, the Mukhavets, which flows due west, splits into two channels. Washed on the north and south by these two channels, and on the south-west by the Bug itself, the small island that rises in the centre of the fortress territory forms the heart of the Brest citadel.

Unlike the three outer sections of the fortress, it was not surrounded by earthworks. It was surrounded, however, by a continuous two-story dark-red brick structure housing the fortress barracks and forming a closed circle, or, as it was then called, a "rondo."

The five hundred rooms of the barracks building could accommodate a garrison of twelve thousand men with provisions and military stores sufficient for a considerable length of time. Moreover, there were spacious cellars under the barracks, and under the cellars there lay an extensive network of underground passages.

The barrack walls, which were nearly five feet thick, could withstand shells of a large calibre.



Ruins of the Terespolsky Gate

Well protected by these walls, riflemen were able to fire on the advancing enemy almost with impunity through the narrow loopholes. Here and there along the outer barracks wall there were semicircular towers with similar loopholes for flanking fire against attacking forces. Two gates, the Terespolsky and the Kholmsky, in the southern section of the circular building, and a big, triple-arch gate in the northern section, linked the inner courtyard by deep tunnels with bridges leading to the three other fortified sectors of the fortress.

Ruins of the Trinity Gate

wall included by these walls, reluctant were able to find room for advancing enemy almost with in sight through the narrow barricades. Here and there along the outer barrier-wall there were semi-circular towers with similar loopholes for flanking fire against attacking forces. Two gates, the Terespolsky and the Kholmsky, in the south-eastern section of the circular building, and a big triple-arch gate in the railway section, broke the inner courtyard by deep tunnels with bridges leading to the three other fortified sections of the fortress.

These three fortified sectors screened the central sector on all sides, two of them, the so-called South and West islands, on the south. The largest fortified sector, which occupied nearly half of the whole fortress territory, protected Central Island on the north, embracing it like a large horseshoe with its two ends running into the Bug and the Mukhavets.

The heart of the fortress was defended on all sides. Before an enemy could approach the fortress barracks, he had to capture at least one of the three outer fortifications of the citadel. And each of these fortifications, surrounded by earthworks and water, with its bastions and ravelins, its strong ramparts for men and guns, its provision and ammunition stores in the depths of the works, was in itself a separate fortress.

In 1842 the building was finished and the Russian military flag was hoisted triumphantly over the Fortress of Brest. Then it was safe to say that a truly formidable stronghold, one of the most powerful of modern fortresses, stood guard over the Bug. The only question was how long it would remain so.

In previous times, when the fighting was done by comparatively small armies, fortresses played a very important part in war. A strongly garrisoned fortress could halt the advance of a

whole army, for the enemy, fearing the activities of the garrison in its rear, did not dare to pass the fortress and was compelled either to engage in a long and difficult siege or at least to dispose a considerable part of its forces for the purpose of confining any activities that the garrison might undertake. Sometimes indeed a whole war consisted of nothing more than a struggle for the capture of certain fortresses.

The science of fortification has always developed side by side with the progress of military science in general. Fortress construction was particularly affected by the development of artillery and it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that guns not only destroyed, but also, in a sense, created fortresses.

Artillery dictated its demands to military engineers in no uncertain terms. The thickness of walls and other details of fortification all depended on the calibre of shells and their penetrative force. Gun range was an important factor in determining the size of fortress territory, and the further shells could be fired the further it was necessary to extend the outer fortifications so as to protect the centre of the fortress from the enemy's fire. To put it briefly, as soon as the first cannon appeared, the history of fortresses became the history of their struggle with artillery.

In the middle of the last century the new Fortress of Brest fully answered the requirements of military science of those days. But only a few years later the Crimean War and the defence of Sevastopol showed quite patently that military science had moved on, and that not one of the existing fortresses could be considered sufficiently modern. Soon afterwards the veritable revolution that occurred in artillery had an immediate effect on the fate of the fortress.

Besides the former smooth-bore cannon there appeared the first guns with rifled barrels. This sharply increased both the range and accuracy of artillery. Now every fortress was vulnerable even in the heart of its territory, for as soon as the enemy approached its outer fortifications they could easily shell the central section of the citadel.

Military engineers set to work to find a way out of the difficulty. A solution was soon found in the creation of forts. The existing fortresses were surrounded by a ring of forts—separate fortifications equipped with artillery and a garrison and placed several miles outside the outer fortress wall. Thus a fresh defence ring that kept the enemy at a distance from the citadel and thus protected it from artillery fire was created round the fortress.

Meanwhile rifled artillery steadily improved and the range of guns increased. The time came

when in spite of its ring of forts, the centre of the main fortress was again threatened.

There was nothing for it but to push the defensive positions forward once more. A similar second ring of forts was then advanced several miles beyond the first. But it was clear that this would not be effective for long. With every increase in the range of artillery the same problem would inevitably arise. But by now another circumstance had arisen that was to decide the fate of the fortress once and for all.

The epoch of imperialism brought into the theatre of military operations massed armies numbering many millions, which bore no comparison with the armies of the past, even the so-called Grande Armée which Napoleon led against Moscow in 1812. And as soon as these new large armies appeared on the scene, fortresses finally lost their strategic importance. They could no longer present any real obstacle to troops advancing in such numbers. Invading armies simply by-passed any fortresses in their path, leaving a small part of their forces to contain them. Far from hindering the enemy's advance, fortresses now proved a liability to the defending side. The necessity of maintaining fortress garrisons diverted troops from manoeuvring operations on the decisive sectors of the front and led to unnecessary scattering of forces.

And if one adds to this the immeasurably increased fire-power of artillery and the appearance of such a new and powerful weapon as aircraft, one is left in no doubt that the fate of fortresses is sealed. Their time is past.

The First World War found the Fortress of Brest feverishly building its second ring of forts. However, the first months of war on the Western Front quickly proved to the Russian command that fortresses could not be saved by reconstruction. The most powerful and up-to-date fortresses of Belgium and France, such as Liége, Namur, Maubeuge, were powerless to stop or even hinder the advance of the German armies and fell one after the other in the space of a few days.

This was instructive, and the Russian command drew a lesson from the fighting on the Western Front. Work on Brest Fortress was stopped and its garrison and practically all its artillery were transferred to the front. Only the stores were left behind and the fortress itself became a mustering point for reserve divisions moving up to the front. When in the summer of 1915 the Germans launched an offensive on the Eastern Front and reached the approaches to Brest, a large part of the stores was evacuated and the troops garrisoning the citadel were ordered to blow up several of the forts and with-

draw without resistance, leaving the fortress to the enemy. From then until the end of the war the Fortress of Brest remained in German hands, and it was there, in 1918, that the Brest Peace Treaty imposing its severe conditions on the young Soviet Republic was signed.

After the imperialist war the western regions of Byelorussia became part of capitalist Poland, whose troops remained masters of the fortress for twenty years, until 1939, when Western Byelorussia regained its rightful place in the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Soviet troops entered the Fortress of Brest. In modern times, of course, the old citadel was of no serious military importance and its fortifications were useless to resist modern artillery and aircraft. The barracks and storehouses, however, were quite useful for accommodating army units and essential supplies, and the re-equipped forts attached to the fortress were to become part of the powerful Brest defence area which Soviet troops began to build up on the bank of the Western Bug.

In the spring of 1941, units of two infantry divisions of the Soviet Army were stationed on the territory of Brest Fortress. They were steady, well-trained and experienced troops, and day by day they continued to improve their military skill in prolonged and arduous marches, in

shooting practice, and in constant exercises and manoeuvres.

One of these divisions, the 6th Orel Red Banner Division, had a long and glorious history. Created during the years of the Civil War, it had received its baptism of fire in memorable battles with the German intervention armies in the region of Pskov, after which it had taken part in the defeat of Denikin in South Russia. Its officers and men cherished the story that had been handed down from generation to generation of how, when the division had first been formed and was leaving for the front, Lenin himself came to the station to see them off and made a speech before the men of the departing division.

The other division, the 42nd Infantry Division, had been formed in 1940 during the Finnish campaign and had already done well in fighting on the Mannerheim Line. Many of its officers and men had been decorated for bravery. The best unit in the division was considered to be the 44th Infantry Regiment, commanded by Major Pyotr Gavrilov, recently a graduate of the Frunze Military Academy. Major Gavrilov, who had volunteered for the Red Army in 1918, taken part in the Civil War, and had been a Communist for nearly twenty years, possessed formidable qualities as an organizer, was a man of

exceptional will-power, and a severe and exacting commander, who trained his men with the utmost persistence and skill. This man was destined in the months to come to play an outstanding part in organizing the heroic defence of the Fortress of Brest.

But although the fortress had been fairly heavily manned with troops in the spring, by the early summer of 1941 the regiments of both divisions, as well as the artillery and tank forces, had been sent out into camps in the surrounding country. The usual summer training began, and work was continued on building up the frontier defence area on the Western Bug. Only the headquarters units and one or two companies of maintenance troops from the regiments remained in the fortress.

Thus, when war came on the night of June 22, 1941, the garrison of the Fortress of Brest amounted to less than two regiments of infantry. If it is taken into account that these were all small groups from different units, scattered all over the fortress territory without any unified organization, it is not difficult to understand how complicated the problem of defence under such conditions must have been. As for artillery and tanks, only a very small force was left in the fortress, added to which some of the vehicles and guns had been dismantled and were to re-

main so until the following morning, when there was to be an inspection.

The German command had information concerning the strength of the garrison left in the fortress, and Field-Marshal von Klüge commanding the 4th German Army, which advanced on Brest, hoped to capture the fortress in the first few hours. In order to make sure of success he decided to give himself overwhelming numerical superiority on this sector. The army corps under General Schrot that was thrown into the frontier zone opposite the Brest Fortress consisted of three fresh and reinforced infantry divisions, one of which, the 45th, that had been the first to enter the blazing ruins of Warsaw and to march triumphantly through conquered Paris, was famed as one of the crack formations in the German Army, and had more than once earned personal praise from Hitler himself. It was this division that was now to deliver the main blow at the Fortress of Brest.

Schrot's whole artillery force with its numerous supplementary artillery and mortar units was brought up to the fortress and camouflaged in the dense thickets of the left bank of the Bug. The German generals were almost certain that this powerful and unexpected artillery bombardment alone, in combination with concentrated air attack, would break the garrison's morale,

and that the infantry which would be flung into the attack after the artillery softening-up would merely have to take prisoner a bunch of dazed and dispirited Russian soldiers.

The enemy had a numerical superiority of over ten to one, and its effect was intensified by the complete surprise of the night attack.

For many years German militarists had gambled on a short war, on the so-called "one-act victory," achieved by a single mortal blow. Clausewitz, Moltke, Schlieffen, all the experts of German military doctrine, had dreamed of such a rapid war, and for many decades the German General Staff had been working out its military plans on the basis of "instantaneous" victory over its future enemies. Moreover, the greatest importance was attached to surprise attack, which the German theorists regarded as the key to the achievement of swift victory in war.

Hitler's generals were the direct heirs and true supporters of the theorists of aggressive German militarism. The theory of blitzkrieg was the cornerstone of all their activity and formed the basis of all the many expansionist plans which they had not only worked out in the seclusion of their studies, but had put into practice on the battle-fields of Europe.

The "Barbarossa plan" was also a plan for lightning war, and surprise attack was one of

its main elements. Hitler Germany concluded a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, put the Soviet people off their guard with peaceful assurances, and in the meantime prepared its treacherous attack in the strictest secrecy. And to a considerable extent the enemy succeeded in achieving its aim of surprise.

Infantry divisions were quietly moved up to the frontier, mainly under cover of darkness. Guns and tanks, carefully camouflaged with branches, were brought into position at night. Hitler's secret agents in the frontier districts of the Soviet Union became more active, and spies and saboteurs were constantly sent across the frontier.

In the region of Brest the Nazi agents were particularly active. In the days immediately preceeding the outbreak of war, Soviet frontier guards frequently arrested spies and saboteurs in the area. On the evening of June 21, German saboteurs, disguised as Soviet soldiers and officers, appeared in the town and even in the fortress. Some of them are said to have been sent across the frontier in a goods train delivering German exports in accordance with the trade agreement that had recently been concluded with the Soviet Union. Working at night, these saboteurs wrecked power stations, cut telephone and telegraph wires in the town and fortress, and

as soon as the first shot was fired began fighting in the Soviet rear.

But secretly though the enemy conducted his operations, they could not pass entirely unnoticed. Soviet intelligence sent reports of the concentration of German troops near the frontier. Soviet frontier guards vigilantly observing the frontier zone reported that every night more and more carefully camouflaged German guns were making their appearance in the left-bank thickets.

News of these menacing intentions arrived through other channels as well. The people of the Polish villages on the far side of the Bug kept a close watch on the German troop concentrations near the Soviet frontier. Sometimes German officers and soldiers spoke openly to the Poles of the forthcoming attack on the U.S.S.R. And many local people, real friends of the Soviet Union, thought anxiously how they could warn the Soviet command of the war that was being prepared. On several occasions daring Polish peasants swam the Bug at the risk of their lives and warned our frontier guards of the intentions of the Nazi command.

All this information was immediately transmitted to Moscow and reported personally to Beria, who was then People's Commissar for Internal Affairs. But the only answer to these

disturbing messages was merely the standard order: "Increase observation."

The unexpectedness of the first powerful blow, the great numerical and technical superiority, the fact that the German troops were already battle-hardened and completely ready for action, all these circumstances gave Hitler's army immense advantages, advantages that would have been enough to ensure decisive victory over any other state. They did not, however, bring the Nazis victory in the war against the U.S.S.R., in spite of all the successes of the German Army in the first period of its Eastern Campaign.

What happened in the summer of 1941 in the Fortress of Brest was only a small episode in the titanic struggle on the Soviet-German front. Yet this episode was extremely characteristic. It was a true reflection of the mighty power of the Soviet people's anger, which was finally to boil over and sweep the evil force of Hitlerism from the face of the earth. The fighting for Brest Fortress was to make the enemy ponder on many things.

Here, on this small sector of the front, the advantages of the Nazi troops could be exploited to the full. The enemy's numerical and technical superiority was particularly great. And yet it did not produce the "lightning" success that had been expected, and the enemy was forced

to buy small-scale victory at a very high cost. By their heroic struggle the handful of Soviet troops defending Brest Fortress, the first yards of their native land, gave the enemy a grim warning of what was to come. Through the fire and smoke of those fierce battles in the old Russian fortress a keen eye might have perceived the defeat of the Nazi army outside Moscow the following winter, the catastrophe it was to suffer at Stalingrad, and the flag of Victory unfurled over the vanquished Berlin Reichstag.

THE ATTACK BEGINS

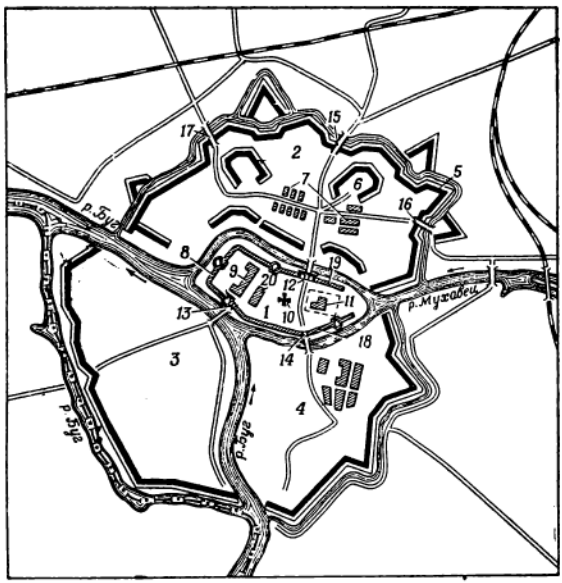
The Fortress of Brest was sleeping peacefully when the German artillery's first salvo thundered over the Bug. Only the men of the forward posts in the riverside bushes and the sentries in the fortress yard saw the great flash that lighted the western horizon and heard the eerily increasing whine. The next moment the earth was shaken by the crash of hundreds of bursting shells.

It was a terrible awakening. The men who that evening had fallen asleep thinking blissfully of the morrow's Sunday rest, with its amusements, its traditional football match, its regimental dances, its outings to town, suddenly awoke

amid fire and death, and many were killed in the first seconds before they were fully awake and aware of what was happening.

The whole fortress was wrapped in a dense cloud of smoke and dust that glowed lividly with the glare of explosions. Buildings collapsed in flames, people were crushed and burned to death. In the officers' quarters in the northern sector of the fortress, and round the building of the frontier commandant's office on Central Island, terrified, half-naked women rushed about with their children in their arms and were cut down by shrapnel. In the barracks, the wounded lay groaning in their own blood, soldiers, armed and unarmed alike, plunged downstairs to the cellars in search of protection from the ever-increasing artillery and air bombardment.

The unavoidable confusion of the first few minutes was intensified by the fact that most of the officers, who spent Saturday night at home outside the fortress, were absent from their units. At the first sound of firing the commanders who lived in the officers' quarters in the northern sector of the fortress made a rush to reach their units in the barracks on Central Island. However, the bridge leading to the island was already under constant machine-gun fire; apparently saboteurs had crossed the Mukhavets in advance and, concealed in the bushes above the river,



Plan of Brest Fortress (1941)

1) Central Island; *2)* northern section of the fortress; *3)* West Island; *4)* South Island; *5)* earthworks; *6)* East Fort; *7)* officers' quarters; *8)* circular barracks; *9)* quarters of the 333rd Infantry Regiment; *10)* garrison club (former chapel); *11)* White Palace; *12)* triple-arch gate of the citadel; *13)* Terespolsky Gate; *14)* Kholmsky Gate; *15)* North (main) entrance gate; *16)* East or Kobrinsky Gate; *17)* North-West Gate; *18)* barracks of the 84th Infantry Regiment; *19)* positions of the Fomin-Zubachov group in the last days of June; *20)* frontier post

Plan of Bow Porters Hall

were blocking the way to the centre of the fortress with a wall of lead. Dozens of men were killed that morning on the bridge and only a few of the commanding officers succeeded in running the gantlet and joining their men. Others who lived in the town were unable even to reach the fortress gates, for the fortress had immediately been cut off from Brest by the German's circular barrage of artillery fire.

The enemy made haste to exploit all the advantages of their sudden onslaught. The guns in the thickets of the left bank were still belching fire and steel while the advance assault units of submachine-gunners of the 45th Infantry Division forced the Bug in rubber boats and rafts and invaded West and South islands of the fortress.

Only a thin line of frontier outposts and patrols was defending these islands. They did all they could. From the riverside bushes and the top of the earthworks that stretched along the river they fired on the enemy boats until their ammunition was exhausted. Groups of frontier guards took up their positions in pill-boxes, in the chambers under the earthworks, and in ruined buildings, determined not to retreat an inch. But there were too few of them to check the attack. The enemy's wave of artillery fire swept over the two islands with savage fury,

clearing the way for the infantry, and meanwhile raft after raft and boat after boat crossed the Bug. Dense lines of submachine-gunners literally swamped both islands, overwhelming the sparsely manned outposts or cutting them off and advancing rapidly to the centre of the fortress.

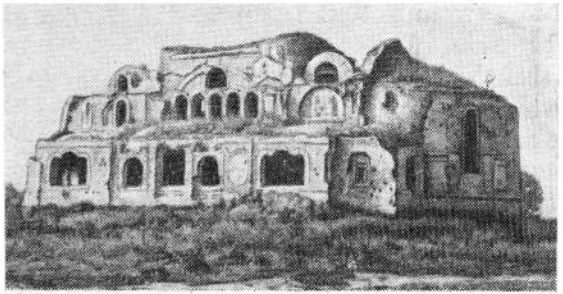
On South Island there were no Soviet army units.There were only stores and a large district hospital, where part of the medical staff lived with their families. The very first shells smashed and set fire to the hospital buildings and houses. Patients from the wards rushed about the hospital yard in panic. Battalion Commissar Bogateyev, deputy political chief of the hospital, who had been wounded in the head by a shell splinter, tried to organize resistance, but needless to say, doctors, nurses and medical orderlies were no match for the enemy's crack infantry. The attempt was nipped in the bud by the advancing German submachine-gunners and Bogateyev himself was killed. Only a few of the patients and hospital staff managed to run across the bridge at the Kholmsky Gate and reach the central barracks, while the rest sought refuge under the earthworks and in cellars and were either shot or taken prisoner by the enemy submachine-gunners as they mopped up the island.

On West Island the German infantry surrounded a resisting group of frontier guards with part of its forces and advanced to the Terespolsky Gate of the citadel. A large detachment of submachine-gunners immediately crossed the bridge and entered the barracks yard.

Central Island and the surrounding structures are dominated by a massive building with long narrow windows that stands in the middle of the yard. At one time it was an Orthodox Russian chapel; the Poles turned it into a Catholic chapel, and with the arrival of Soviet troops in the fortress it was converted into a garrison club.

On entering the citadel yard the Germans were quick to realize all the advantages of this building, and since it was empty—in the first moments of confusion none of the garrison had had time to think of it as a possible strong-point —it was the work of a moment for the Germans to take possession. The submachine-gunners brought with them a transmitter and stationed machine-guns at all the windows.

This was a blow at the very heart of the Soviet defences. Now the enemy was in possession of the key position on Central Island and from the club windows was in an ideal position to disorganize the defenders with powerful fire in their rear.



Ruins of the garrison club (former chapel)

Flushed with success, the enemy strove to consolidate and develop their position. A large detachment of submachine-gunners advanced to the eastern tip of the island in an attempt to gain complete possession of the centre of the fortress. Informed of their movements by radio, the German artillery stopped shelling that section of the citadel.

Opposite the club, in the eastern section of the island stood a building surrounded by a concrete wall and railings. This was the White Palace, where the Peace Treaty of Brest had once been signed. It had been half demolished in 1939.

The southern part of the palace wall ran parallel with the barracks, forming a wide street. The submachine-gunners advanced in a mob down this street, calling to one another guttur-

Ruins of the garrison church (Garnisonskirche)

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The southern part of the palace wall was parallel with the barracks, forming a wide street. The submachine-gunners advanced in a row, one to this street, calling to one another prior-

ally and firing all the time at the windows on either side.

Their fire was not returned. Apparently the Soviet garrison, crushed and overwhelmed by the artillery and air bombardment, had no more strength to resist and the centre of the fortress would be captured without a fight. Through the dust and smoke the gap in the ring of barracks and the tall water-tower on the bank where the Mukhavets divides into two channels could be seen in the growing light of day.

And suddenly a quite unexpected and staggering blow struck the enemy. A muffled long-drawn shout was heard from inside the barracks, the doors leading into the yard were suddenly flung open, and with a fierce "hurrah" a mass of armed Soviet fighting men with fixed bayonets charged the centre of the advancing German detachment.

In a few minutes the enemy was smashed. The bayonet charge sliced the German detachment in two like a knife. The submachine-gunners who had not reached the barrack doors fled in panic towards the club building and the Terespolsky Gate by which they had entered the yard. The other half of the detachment, cut off from their fellows, rushed down the street towards the eastern tip of the island with the triumphantly cheering Soviet soldiers on their heels.

As soon as a German submachine-gunner fell to the ground, Soviet soldiers flung themselves on him for his weapon, and if it was a Soviet soldier who fell, his rifle also passed into the hands of a comrade and continued its merciless work among the enemy.

The Germans were pressed back to the bank of the Mukhavets and quickly destroyed. Some of them tried to escape by swimming but these were accounted for by Soviet light machine-guns and not a single enemy soldier succeeded in reaching the opposite bank.

This was the first counter-attack against the forces storming the fortress, and it was delivered by the men of the 84th Infantry Regiment occupying the south-east section of the barracks building.

That night the regiment had only one infantry battalion and a few headquarters units at its disposal. Nearly all the officers were at camp with the other battalions, or were spending the night at their homes in town. Only two or three lieutenants, platoon commanders, were sleeping at regiment headquarters. Apart from these the only other officer on the spot was Regimental Commissar Yefim Fomin, who was sleeping temporarily in his office.

The previous evening Fomin had been granted a few days leave to bring his family to Brest

Regimental Commissar
Yefim Fomin

from his previous station in Latvia. At about ten o'clock he had driven to the station but had been unable to obtain a ticket and had returned to headquarters with the intention of postponing his journey till the next day. He sat up late talking to the regiment's Y.C.L. secretary, Samvel Matevosyan, and they were scarcely asleep before enemy bombs and shells began falling on the fortress.

The windows of this part of the barracks looked out over the Mukhavets, in the direction of the frontier. Several shells burst inside the building, causing fires and destruction. Rifles that had been stacked in piles were smashed or buried and many of the men were left without arms. An incendiary shell fell in Fomin's office and the commissar, half suffocated by the acrid smoke, only just managed to escape alive.

Patriotic Armenian
Felix Ohan

sent his previous duties in Latvia. A number of times he had driven to the station but had been unable to secure a ticket and had returned to headquarters with the intention of [illegible]. His journey [illegible] by. He set up [illegible] in the [illegible] Y.M.C.A. secretary, Samuel Mahseredjian, and they were scarcely [illegible] when [illegible] began falling on the houses.

The windows of the parsonage barracks looked out over the Mediterranean, on the direction of the frontier. Several shells burst inside the building, causing fires and destruction. Before they had been stocked in case there was a [illegible] and many of the men were [illegible] without arms. The secretary sent [illegible] place of the supervisor, [illegible] by the [illegible] smoke, only just managed to escape alive.

He at once took over command of the regimental units, assisted by Y.C.L. secretary Matevosyan. It took a certain amount of time to overcome the initial confusion, to arm the men and assemble them in the comparative safety of a cellar. Here Fomin made a brief speech, reminding them of their patriotic duty and calling upon them to fight with all the courage at their command. Then on Fomin's orders, Matevosyan led his men in the first bayonet charge, which was to end in the annihilation of the group of submachine-gunners cut off on the eastern tip of the island.

Regiment's Y.C.L. Secretary Samvel Matevosyan, 1941

Meanwhile the remnants of the German detachment who had fled back to the Terespolsky Gate found themselves unable to link up with their own forces. Their path of retreat was blocked.

Rodzianko's S.S.R. Synagogue
Retreat Shakhovskoi, 1917

...he at once took over command of the continental army, assisted by V.I.L. secretary, Nekrasovgan. It took a certain amount of time to coordinate the [illegible] and assemble them in the outpost[illegible] safety of a Stolypin Horse Guards made a brief speech, in reminding them of their patriotic duty and calling upon them to fight with all the energy at their command. That on Finland's eastern Nekrasovgan of his men in the first heroic charge, which was to end in the annihilation of the group of submachine-gunners cut off on the eastern tip of the island.

Nevertheless the remnants of the German detachment who had fled back to the Tornensky Gate found themselves unable to take up with their own forces. Their path of retreat was blocked

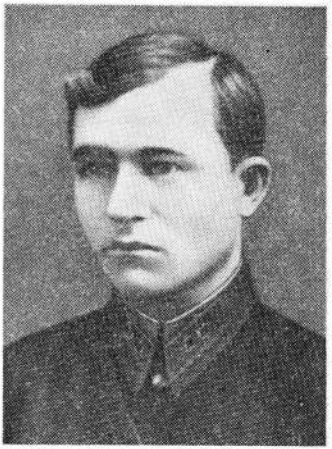
Near the Terespolsky Gate were the buildings where the third commandant's office of the 17th Detachment and the 9th Frontier Post were quartered. Behind these buildings, across the central yard of the citadel, stretched a long two-storey building, quartering the 333rd Infantry Regiment, which on the night of the outbreak of war, like all the other units, had only a few troops at its disposal. These included a regimental N.C.O.'s course and a platoon of bandsmen.

The commandant's office and frontier post were destroyed by the first shells; many of the frontier guards together with officers' wives and children were buried under the ruins. As the barracks of the 333rd Regiment collapsed, half-dressed infantrymen rushed for the cellars to escape the hurricane of fire. Here, as everywhere else, the initial confusion was complete and the German detachment that entered the yard through the Terespolsky Gate encountered no resistance from that quarter.

But by the time the submachine-gunners had occupied the club and were trying to advance to the eastern tip of the island, where they were scattered by Commissar Fomin's bayonet charge, the situation at the Terespolsky Gate had also changed.

The frontier guards quickly recovered from their

initial confusion and took up defensive positions in the ruins of the post under their commander Lieutenant Andrei Kizhevatov. Lieutenant Alexander Sanin and Senior Lieutenant Potapov went down into the cellars of the 333rd Regiment's barracks to take command of their men. The women and children who had escaped from their quarters in time were safely lodged in the deep cellars under the building. Riflemen and machine-gunners were stationed at the windows. And when the remains of the German detachment routed by the bayonet attack and pursued by men of the 84th, rushed back to the Terespolsky Gate, they were met with point-blank fire from the rifles and machine-guns of Kizhevatov, Potapov and Sanin's men. The Germans who survived took refuge in the club, for



Lieutenant Andrei Kizhevatov, commander of the 9th frontier post

Lieutenant Andrej Kiss-Kalo, commander of the 5th Fortress gun

[illegible] and took up defensive positions in the vicinity of the pool under their commander Lieutenant Andrej Kiss-Kalo. Lieutenant Alexander Sarlo and Senior Lieutenant Polgyes went down into the cellars of the 23rd Regiment's kitchen to take some rest of their own. The women and children who had escaped from their homes in time were safely lodged in the large cellars under the building. Different old machine-guns were stationed at the windows. And when the remains of the German detachment routed by the layered attack and turned to run at the 5th, rushed back to the Szentendrei Gate, they were met with pouring fire from the rifles and machine guns of Kiss-Kalo, Polgyes and Sarlo's men. The Germans who survived took refuge in the club, for

the road by which half an hour before they had entered the fortress yard was now blocked.

A rather curious situation had developed. The submachine-gunners had broken through to the centre of the fortress and seized its key position, the club, from the windows of which their machine-guns could harass and disorganize the Soviet defence. But at the same time they unexpectedly found themselves cut off and surrounded and had only their radio to keep in touch with their command. They were still confident, however, that they would soon be relieved, for the storming of the fortress continued with mounting fury and more and more enemy forces were coming into action.

Advancing from west and east, the enemy infantry quickly threw a cordon round the fortress. The artillery fire continued while Junkers bombers circled above the fortress amid the dense smoke rising from numerous fires. There were German submachine-gunners not only on West and South islands, and not only in the centre of the fortress yard; they had even crossed the earthworks into the northern sector of the fortress. Nearly half of the fortress was in enemy hands and it seemed that the next few hours must inevitably decide the outcome of the struggle in the enemy's favour.

But what had happened on Central Island

also happened in other parts of the fortress. Recovering from its initial surprise and confusion, the garrison began a stubborn and bitter resistance. It was the same in all sectors of the citadel, in spite of the fact that they were cut off from one another by the enemy's fire. The women, children and wounded were rushed to safety, the soldiers armed themselves and any junior officer who happened to be on the spot took command and organized the defence, and if there were no officers present a sergeant or rank-and-file soldier would take command himself. Accurate rifle and machine-gun fire decimated the ranks of the attacking submachine-gunners, snipers took their toll of the German officers, and at critical moments the Soviet infantry's bayonet charges never failed to repel the enemy with heavy losses.

All the efforts of the enemy's assault forces to reach the central citadel and rescue their submachine-gunners trapped in the club building ended in failure. The bridge across the Bug at the Terespolsky Gate was now under rifle and machine-gun fire and the frontier guards and men of the 333rd let no one pass. Having captured the hospital on South Island, the Germans tried to penetrate the central courtyard by way of the bridge over the Mukhavets leading to the Kholmsky Gate. But just opposite the bridge, in

the circular barracks were the quarters of the 84th Regiment, and Commissar Fomin, who had foreseen the danger of attack from the South Island, had stationed his men at the windows facing the hospital. Rifle and machine-gun fire literally swept the submachine-gunners from the bridge whenever they attempted to attack. And although the enemy repeated their attempts all day and the bridge became littered with corpses, the enemy did not succeed in reaching the gate. The Germans also failed to force the Mukhavets in their rubber boats. Dozens of boats loaded with submachine-gunners went to the bottom under the fire of the Soviet infantry.

In exasperated surprise the German command saw that the resistance of the fortress garrison, far from weakening, was actually becoming more and more determined and organized, and that more and more centres of resistance were springing up on the fortress territory. On the captured West and South islands groups of Soviet frontier guards put up a bitter struggle, although surrounded and cut off by submachine-gunners. These men in their green-topped caps fought so desperately and inflicted such heavy losses on the enemy that the infuriated Nazi officers ordered their troops not to take even wounded frontier guards prisoner, but to shoot them on the spot.

But in any case the frontier guards did not allow themselves to be taken prisoner, preferring to die in battle or commit suicide, rather than surrender to the enemy alive. Such was the death of Sergeant Petrinchik, a young Byelorussian, on West Island. Although wounded and surrounded by submachine-gunners, he fought back for a long time, lying in a ruined building, and making every bullet find its mark, except his last, which he kept for himself.

So died an unknown frontier guard, who on

Group of frontier guards of Brest Fortress

[illegible] in any case the Scottish guards did not allow themselves to be taken prisoner, preferring [illegible] to [illegible] or [illegible] which [illegible] surrender to the enemy alive. Such was the case of Sergeant Petrovsky, a young Bolshevik, on [illegible], although wounded and surrounded by submachine-gunners, he fought back for a long time, lying in a ravine building, and using every bullet for its very, except the last, which he kept for himself.

So died an unknown Soviet guard, who so

Group of Soviet guards at their Patrol

the night of the outbreak of war was on sentry duty outside the cell where two German spies arrested in the fortress the day before were imprisoned. He did not leave his post although German shells were falling all round him. When submachine-gunners appeared on the scene, the frontier guard engaged them. The spies hammered wildly on the door of their cell, shouting loudly for help, and the attackers responded with even greater efforts to reach them. The frontier guard had only one clip of cartridges left and, realizing that he could not stop the enemy, he made his decision. When the German submachine-gunners burst into the cell, they found three corpses—the young sentry had killed both the spies, then shot himself through the heart.

A sound defence developed in the northern sector of the fortress, where various scattered units were assembled and led by Major Gavrilov, commander of the 44th Infantry Regiment. As soon as the German bombardment started, he left his sick wife and little son at home and rushed to his headquarters, hoping to save the regiment's banner and secret papers. The regiment's headquarters was on Central Island in the extreme western sector of the circular barracks, where the enemy's fire was particularly heavy. When Gavrilov reached it the building was already on fire. Entry was impossible for

shells were still tearing at the burning building and evidently both banner and papers had already perished in the flames. In the semi-darkness, amid clouds of smoke and dust raised by the explosions soldiers could be seen darting about the yard. Somehow Gavrilov succeeded in gathering a dozen or two of his men and led them across the bridge towards the northern outskirts of Brest, where the whole regiment was to have assembled in event of an alarm.

It turned out, however, that the Germans had already blocked the road to the town. Soviet infantry were holding the earthworks at the North Gate and along the bank of the moat, and on the far bank the figures of German submachine-gunners could be seen moving cautiously among the bushes.

Several hundred Soviet troops assembled at the North Gate. Among them were two or three lieutenants and a political organizer, but since no senior officers were present, Gavrilov took command of these scattered groups from various units and formed them into three companies. Upon his orders the infantry took up positions on the top of the north and north-east earthworks, and one of the companies prepared to meet attack from the west, where the barracks of the 125th Regiment were being ferociously attacked by German submachine-gunners.

In the centre of this defence sector, on the east and west of the road leading to the gate there were two forts. Each of these forts, with its two hoof-shaped outer ramparts, its massive keep in the narrow courtyard between them, and its strong chambers in the ramparts themselves, could be used as a strong-point. Gavrilov ordered one of his companies to man the West Fort, and to set up a heavy machine-gun in the concrete block-house recently built close by.

It was the East Fort, however, that became the keystone of the Gavrilov detachment's defence. In this fort there turned out to be a small garrison composed of men of the 393rd Independent Anti-Aircraft Battalion, now commanded by Senior Lieutenant Shramko, and lieutenants Damienko and Yakov Kolomiets of the 125th Infantry Regiment. The artillerymen had taken up their positions in the keep of the fort and were already prepared for action. A heavy anti-aircraft machine-gun had been set up at a loop-hole on the first floor, two men were hurriedly loading spare belts, and the other loop-holes were manned with light machine-guns and rifles. The artillerymen had a radio transmitter in working order, telephones and spare cable, and the storerooms of the fort contained provisions and ammunition. In the trenches near the fort there were two anti-aircraft guns, which were quickly

manned by gun-crews under the command of a lieutenant.

Gavrilov took command of the artillerymen and set up his headquarters at the fort under the command of Captain Konstantin Kasatkin, formerly commander of an independent signals battalion. Kasatkin's battalion was in camp outside Brest and the captain had come into the fortress that night to visit his family. The war had caught him there. He had tried to get away across the fortress wall to rejoin his battalion, but the Germans had captured the road into town and Kasatkin's only alternative was to join Major Gavrilov's detachment. When he was appointed chief of staff, he immediately set up a comma d post in one of the central chambers of the fort and with the help of the anti-aircraft battalion's signallers established telephone com-

Captain Konstantin Kasatkin, 1941

Captain Konstantin Rokossovsky, 1941

trained by gendarmes under the command of a lieutenant.

Rokossovsky was assigned to the artillery unit and set up his headquarters at the fort under the command of Captain Konstantin Kuzmich Ivanovsky and commander of an independent squadron of cavalry. Rokossovsky's battalion was in camp outside Brest and the captain had come into the fortress that night to visit his friends. The war had caught him there. He had tried to get away across the Germans had captured the road into town and Rokossovsky's only alternative was to join Major Gavrilov's detachment. When he was appointed head of staff, he immediately set up a command post in one of the central chambers of the fort and with the help of the non-commissioned officers organized additional telephone com-

munication with all three companies. Meanwhile Political Organizer Skripnik, whom Gavrilov had appointed as his second in command, found a place for the women and children from the officers' quarters in one of the fort's shelters, where he also organized a hospital, putting assistant surgeon Raisa Abakumova in charge.

Major Gavrilov's small detachment was soon ready to face the enemy, and when an hour later the invaders attacked the outer walls and the West Fort, they were met with powerful fire and all their attacks on this sector failed.

There was stubborn fighting at the eastern, Kobrinsky Gate of the fortress, where the 98th Anti-Tank Artillery Battalion under Major Nikitin was stationed. From the very first, the enemy had directed particularly heavy fire against this sector. Most of the guns and tractors had been destroyed or damaged, added to which the unit had lost its commander. Command of the unit was taken over by Nikitin's political assistant Senior Political Organizer Nikolai Nesterchuk and the battalion chief of staff Lieutenant Ivan Akimochkin.

After giving orders for the women and children to be sheltered inside the earthworks, Nesterchuk and Akimochkin ordered their men to mount the remaining guns on the earthworks, organized the supply of ammunition, and posi-

tioned their machine-gunners and riflemen for defence. When the Germans came round the south-east side of the fortress and showed themselves near the Kobrinsky Gate, the battalion's artillery and machine-guns met them with fire at close range. The enemy was stopped and his attacks petered out one after another under the withering fire of the Soviet guns.

The first half of June 22 passed in stubborn fighting that grew in intensity with every hour. The German artillery kept up its shelling of the fortress. The Junkers carried out dive-bombing attacks on the main centres of Soviet resistance and the enemy infantry continued its assault on all sectors. But soon the figures of the losses suffered by the attacking forces grew to such menacing proportions that the German command was compelled to give them serious attention.

Many months later the staff papers of the 45th Infantry Division were captured on one of the sectors of the Soviet-German front. They contained a "Battle Report on the Capture of Brest-Litovsk," a curious document giving certain details of the fighting for the Brest Fortress. This is what happened in the fortress on the first day of the war, as seen by one of the enemy's staff officers.

"Quite soon, however (between 5.30 and 7.30), it became evident," says the report, "that

behind our advancing infantry the Russians had begun resisting stubbornly and persistently in infantry fighting, making use of 35 to 40 tanks and armoured vehicles stationed in the fortress. Firing rapidly from attic windows and basements, their snipers soon caused heavy losses among our officers and N.C.O.s.

"Before lunch it became clear that artillery support during the close-quarters fighting in the fortress was impossible, since our infantry was in very close contact with the Russians and it was impossible to ascertain the position of our line in the maze of buildings, bushes and debris. In places the line was severed or blocked by nests of Russian resistance. Attempts by individual infantry anti-tank weapons and light field artillery to operate over open sights failed largely because of insufficient opportunity for observation and the threat thus caused to our own men, and secondly because of the thickness of the walls and buildings of the fortress.

"For the same reasons a passing battery of assault artillery, which the commander of the 135th Infantry Regiment commandeered on his own initiative after lunch, had no effect either.

"The use of fresh forces of the 133rd Infantry Regiment (previously the corps reserve) on South and West islands after 13.15 brought no

further change in the situation. Where the Russians were driven or smoked out, new forces shortly reappeared from cellars, pipes and other hiding places. Their marksmanship was excellent, with the result that our losses increased considerably.

"At 13.15, the division commander decided after personal inspection of the 135th Infantry Regiment (North Island) that the fortress could not be taken by assault, and at about 14.30 he decided to withdraw his own forces so as to surround the fortress on all sides, and then from early morning on 23.6 (after withdrawing during the night) to carry out a carefully observed bombardment of the fortress with the aim of wearing out and destroying the Russians. At 18.30 this decision was categorically approved by the command of the 4th Army."

This report gives a fairly accurate picture of the first day's fighting for the fortress. True, the defenders had far fewer than the thirty-five or forty tanks and armoured vehicles claimed by the German staff officers, and it was certainly not the thickness of the fortress walls that was the main obstacle to the attackers. It was the stubborn, heroic resistance of the little garrison, and its skilful and determined defensive operations, that forced the German troops to halt at the fortress on the very first day of the war.

And they were not merely halted. The order which the assault forces received on the evening of June 22 was, in effect, the first order of retreat issued to German troops in World War II. The German army had never once retreated in the west, north or south of Europe, but it was compelled to retreat in the region of Brest Fortress on the first day of its Eastern war against the U.S.S.R.

"The units that had penetrated into the fortress," the report continues, "were in accordance with the order withdrawn by night to the blockade line. Moreover it was most unpleasant that the Russians immediately attacked the areas that were abandoned, while a group of German soldiers (infantrymen and engineers, their numbers were never established) remained trapped in the fortress chapel (Central Island). Radio communication with the trapped men continued intermittently."

It should be added that this radio communication was soon cut short. The fortress garrison not only attacked and firmly entrenched themselves in the areas from which the Germans withdrew, they also liquidated many surrounded enemy groups. On Central Island Fomin's men and Potapov and Kizhevatov's infantry launched a double attack on the club where the submachine-gunners had set up their transmitter. The

enemy's resistance was broken and the fascist detachment in the club destroyed.

On the first day the enemy not only failed to capture the fortress in a few hours, as they had planned. Their assault forces were halved in number and in places routed or forced to retreat. Only South and West islands, where incidentally groups of Soviet frontier guards were still fighting, remained in German hands. The whole of the rest of the fortress territory, literally strewn with corpses in grey-green uniforms, was still out of the enemy's reach, and here the Soviet fighting men and their commanders worked all night without sleep or rest strengthening their fortifications and preparing for the fresh assault that would come with the dawn.

IN THE FOREFRONT OF BATTLE

From the outset of the fighting, the defenders of the Brest Fortress, from the commanders directing the defence to the rank-and-file infantrymen, were all possessed by the same feeling. This was a deep unshakeable conviction that the enemy who had so treacherously attacked their country would before long be utterly defeated and hurled back across the state frontier, that at any moment the Soviet troops stationed in

the Brest area would come to the relief of the besieged fortress and the frontier would be firmly restored.

Citizens of the Soviet Union, well aware of the strength of their great country and its army, brought up on the victorious traditions of the Soviet fighting forces, they could not think otherwise, and they did not for a moment realize the immense strength of the enemy, nor the dire consequences of his surprise attack. Could any of them at that time conceive for a moment that three long years were to pass before the ruined walls of the fortress would again see Soviet troops? Had there been a man among the ranks of the defenders on that first day of war who had dared to say that the Soviet Army would take weeks or even months (not to mention years!) to repel the onslaught of Hitler Germany, his comrades would have considered him a madman or shot him on the spot as a coward and a traitor. No, they expected help to arrive at any time. The thought that before long they would see their own people lent them fresh strength in the unequal struggle and reinforced their will and determination.

In the early hours of war the fortress had been cut off from the outer world and surrounded by German troops. What was going on out there, beyond the fortress walls, what was hap-

pening in the town and in the neighbouring frontier districts, the garrison did not know. Their headquarters were in Brest, and as yet there had been no instructions from the town, presumably because the messengers and liaison officers could not get through. As for the telephone and telegraph lines, they had either been cut by German saboteurs before military operations had started, or had been damaged during the bombardment.

In the first place, the officers commanding the defence of Central Island attempted to get in touch with senior headquarters by radio, but most of the unit's radio-sets had been destroyed or damaged by artillery fire. Only in the 84th Regiment's barracks, where part of the regimental signal company's equipment was still intact, was it possible by midday to fix up one of the radio-sets. Regimental Commissar Fomin wrote several radio messages in code for division headquarters and ordered them to be sent at once.

But there was no response from division or any other radio station. All attempts to transmit a message in code failed. It seemed as if the Germans had not only surrounded the fortress, but had taken possession of the ether itself. Guttural German commands could be heard on all wave-lengths, only occasionally interrupted by

Signaller B. Mikhailovsky

brief sharp exclamations from our tankmen fighting a tank battle somewhere, or by the shouts of our airmen as they battled overhead with Junkers and Messerschmitts.

Fomin then decided to abandon code and go over to plain language. Taking into account the fact that his message might be intercepted by the enemy, he composed an exaggeratedly optimistic radiogram, and signaller Mikhailovsky, a Y.C.L. member, again sat down at the microphone.

"This is Fortress, this is Fortress!" the new message sounded over the air. "We are fighting. Ammunition in good supply, losses slight. Await instructions. Over."

Again and again Mikhailovsky repeated these words, but there was no reply. The transmitter went on sending out its signals until in the end the supply of current was exhausted, then the

Signaller D. Mikhailenko

...ical injury could weaken their unbroken fighting spirit. Battle scenes, or by the ability of our airmen as they battled overhead ... with fighters and Messerschmitts.

From then on ... robot to Moscow and ... plain language. Taking into ... must not let that ... message might be intercepted by the enemy, he composed an exaggeratedly optimistic radiogram, and signaler Mikhailenko, a Y.C.L. member, again sat down at the instrument.

"This is Tolchino. This is Tolchino!" the new message soon crackled over the air. "We are fighting. Ammunition in good supply. Issued Night Soviet Information. Over."

Again and again Mikhailenko repeated these words, but there was no reply. The transmitter went on sending out its signals until in the end the supply of current was exhausted. Then the

voice of the heroic fortress was heard no more over the air.

The radio operator in the East Fort, who on Gavrilov's orders kept sending out signals, met with similar failure. There was no answer. The major realized that all attempts to get into radio communication were futile and in order to save his batteries ordered the set to be switched off and only used for receiving the latest news bulletins.

On that first day a few of the units still had receivers that were working. There was one in the club of the 98th Anti-Tank Battalion. This club was in an underground concrete cellar that had once been a storeroom, and it was here that Nesterchuk, now commander of the artillery, had ordered the officers' wives and children to be accommodated. In this dark underground chamber, where Red Army man Sokolov guarding the battalion's banner stood motionless by the radio, with women and children huddled on the floor all round him, a distant voice from Moscow was heard through the crash of bursting shells overhead, telling of Hitler's attack on the U.S.S.R.

The Moscow broadcast was received in the East Fort and also by the signallers of the 333rd Rifle Regiment on Central Island. In the cramped cellar the voice of the Moscow announcer was heard very faintly, for the battery

was running low, but the soldiers crowding round the receiver listened with bated breath.

Meanwhile attempts were still being made to get in touch with headquarters. At various times all through the day commanders in various parts of the fortress sent out patrols with orders to reach the town. In most cases these patrols returned depleted, having failed to break through the tight ring of German infantry. Others disappeared without trace; even if individual scouts did succeed in reaching the town, they were unable to get back and report their findings.

At midday Regimental Commissar Fomin decided to send a patrol into the town in armoured cars.

In one of the buildings of the White Palace there was a special intelligence battalion. On the night of the outbreak of war a group of men was sleeping in the battalion barracks and in the garage outside there were seven armoured cars that had been brought in for repair. Working under fire, the men of the battalion, led by their Y.C.L. secretary, who had taken over command, succeeded in getting five armoured cars in working order in the course of a few hours. After loading their vehicles with shells and cartridges at a blazing ammunition store, where they risked being blown sky high, they reported to Fomin for further orders.

At that moment the commissar was sitting in the cellar of the White Palace interrogating a German officer who had just been taken prisoner. The prisoner turned out to be a lieutenant-colonel of the 45th Infantry Division's intelligence department. His field case had been found to contain, along with a detailed plan of the fortress, important staff papers that would be of great interest to Soviet headquarters. The commissar was just thinking how to send these papers to division headquarters when it was reported to him that the armoured cars were ready. It was decided that three armoured cars should attempt to break through to the town, and that they should be commanded by Matevosyan, Y.C.L. secretary and the commissar's second in command. Fomin also entrusted him with the task of delivering the captured documents to headquarters.

By this time Matevosyan was no longer considered an assistant political organizer, but a regimental commissar. Fomin had a spare tunic with him with regimental commissar's insignia on the collar tabs, which he ordered the Y.C.L. secretary to put on. When Matevosyan tried to protest, Fomin explained to him that there were too few officers in the fortress and the men would feel more confident if they knew they had another senior officer among them. There was nothing for the Y.C.L. secretary to do but obey

his chief's order and, thus suddenly promoted, he commanded one of the vital sectors of the 84th Regiment's defence. Now he was to carry out another dangerous and responsible mission entrusted to him by Fomin and to establish contact with division headquarters.

The commissar put his arm warmly round the Y.C.L. secretary when they said good-bye and Matevosyan took his seat in the leading car. The three armoured cars dashed over the bridge under enemy machine-gun fire and headed in the direction of the outer North Gate of the fortress. But at that moment fighting was going on round the gate and the tunnel of the gate itself was blocked by a burning German vehicle. At Matevosyan's command the armoured cars turned left to the north-west gate, but found the same situation there. Only the eastern, Kobrinsky Gate, the nearest to the town, remained and the Y.C.L. secretary hastily ordered his driver to turn in that direction.

The road to the gate led past the officers' quarters of the 125th and 333rd rifle regiments. From a distance Matevosyan and his men noticed that fighting was going on round the buildings. German submachine-gunners were advancing in a half-circle and were raking the windows with fire; the answering fire from the buildings was slow and sparing.

Defenders of Brest Fortress, from the painting by P. Krivonogov

The armoured cars swung round together and struck at the Germans' rear with all their machine-guns. In a few minutes the fascist detachment was wiped out. From doors and windows the people who had been besieged in the buildings came running joyfully towards their rescuers. There were only a few officers and men, the rest were women and children.

A young woman was the first to reach Matevosyan as he jumped out of his car. Her flowered silk dress was torn, blood trickled from a bullet scar on her cheek and she was gripping a German submachine-gun. She grasped his arm, panting and still full of the excitement of the recent battle.

"Comrade Commissar, what shall we do? We're nearly out of ammunition!"

The others jostled round the Y.C.L. secretary, showering him with questions about the situation in the fortress. Among them were a captain with a blood-stained bandage round his forehead, women anxiously clasping little children to their breasts, and other women with weapons, a youngster carrying a German grenade with a long wooden handle, and half-naked soldiers with rifles.

Matevosyan did his best to reassure these people, advising them to try and get to defence headquarters on Central Island. He told them

confidently that a relief force would soon arrive and the enemy would be smashed and thrown back. Having put the captain in charge of the group, he got back into his armoured car, and the three vehicles roared away in the direction of the Kobrinsky Gate.

But fighting was going on there, too, and the gate itself was blocked with the mangled tractors and guns of the 98th Artillery Battalion. There was no way out of the fortress.

Matevosyan had to turn back and half an hour later brought all three armoured cars back to the White Palace and reported his failure to Fomin.

It was decided to postpone further attempts at reconnaissance until nightfall. For the time being the garrison could only guess at what was happening in the town and the surrounding country from the distant roar of battle that reached the fortress during lulls in the fighting. All the first day the roar could be heard, now closer, now farther away, and rumours of the approach of Soviet forces kept flashing round the fortress, inspiring the defenders to fight with redoubled energy.

The whole day the German air force ruled the air and Junkers made continual dive-bombing attacks on the fortress. Two or three times Soviet fighters put in an appearance, and although

the enemy always had the advantage, the fortress cheered at the sight of the red stars on their wings. In the early part of the day a little Soviet "Chaika," which had used up all its ammunition, suddenly lunged forward and rammed an enemy aircraft over Brest aerodrome. The men stationed in the yard of the White Palace, who had been watching the fight and were amazed at the Soviet pilot's daring, opened a withering fire on the enemy positions as if to take revenge for the pilot's heroic death. When half an hour later, one of the enemy aircraft dived low to strafe their positions, the infantry met it with steady rifle fire and the burning plane, just managing to clear the trees of West Island, crashed somewhere on the other side of the Bug. Thus, the death of the courageous pilot who was the first man during the Great Patriotic War to ram an enemy aircraft was soon avenged by the riflemen of the 84th Regiment, who also for the first time in the history of the war shot down an enemy aircraft with rifle fire.

On the same day another fascist bomber was shot down, this time by the anti-aircraft gunners, whose guns were mounted not far from the East Fort. A jubilant shout went up from the defenders as, damaged by a direct hit, the huge plane crashed in flames behind the officers' quarters. But the remaining enemy planes carried out a

fierce attack on the anti-aircraft gun emplacements and soon one of the guns was put out of action, many of the crew killed and their commander seriously wounded, although he did not leave his post at the guns. Nevertheless the loss of the bomber made the enemy more cautious and forced them to fly higher.

The whole first day passed in expectation and unrealized hopes that the siege would be lifted. As soon as night began to fall the commanders renewed their attempts to send patrols into the town.

But the enemy, having withdrawn his forces behind the fortress wall, was on the alert. Rocket flares were fired continuously along the whole line of siege, large parts of the earthworks were lit up by searchlights and the enemy observers kept a keen look-out for any movement on the part of the defenders. None of the patrols succeeded in crossing the earthworks, for at every attempt they came under powerful machine-gun fire from the enemy.

In the 84th Regiment's sector two of Fomin's scouts slipped into the water on the eastern edge of Central Island and swam the Mukhavets. But fierce firing broke out on the spot where they should have reached the opposite bank and everyone realized that the scouts had either been killed or fallen into enemy hands. Fomin was

about to abandon further attempts when Signaller Mikhailovsky, a Young Communist Leaguer, suggested an ingenious method of underwater reconnaissance.

Several men put on respirators. The flexible air tube was detached from its box and joined to several others and a small wooden float fitted to the end of the pipe thus formed. The men then tied bricks to their feet and slipped cautiously into the river. Breathing through the air pipes held up on the surface by their wooden floats, they made their way upstream along the slippery uneven bed of the river. They were already outside the fortress and confident of making a successful reconnaissance, when their path was barred by an unexpected obstacle under the water. A strong iron grille had been fixed across the river.

One of the scouts decided to surface and try to climb over the grille. But no sooner did his head appear than it was spotted in the light of the constantly bursting flares and German machine-guns opened fire from both banks. Apparently special machine-gun nests had been set up to guard the grille, and the scouts, realizing that there was no way of getting past this obstacle, returned to their base.

Afterwards, captured German soldiers told the fortress defenders how the grille came to be

there. The enemy commanders had been afraid the besieged garrison might receive reinforcements by boat, and on the evening of the first day German engineers had set up the grille in the river, lowering it under the protection of two machine-guns.

The return of the divers meant giving up the last hope of making contact with the town. There was nothing for it but to wait until the enemy siege was broken by Soviet forces from outside. No one, incidentally, had any doubt that this would happen within a very few hours.

But the night passed and was followed by a bright sunny morning, and now the roar of firing, which the day before had sounded so powerfully from the direction of the town, had died to a faint, scarcely audible rumble in the east. By the end of the day it could not be heard at all. The defenders understood that the enemy had pressed on, that the front-line had fallen back from the fortress, and for the first time they began to realize that they might have to fight for many more days before the retreating Soviet armies recovered and struck a counter-blow. Every man prepared himself inwardly for the terrible testing that he was to undergo in this fierce and unequal struggle.

But there was not much time for thinking of such things. At the crack of dawn the enemy

guns thundered again and Junkers came swooping over the fortress; rested and reinforced during the night, the enemy assault groups renewed their attack on all sides with fresh vigour. The defenders' sole concern now was beating back the enemy onslaught, holding out, and only during the short lulls between artillery bombardments and fresh attacks was there time to strain one's ears listening to the distant rumble of firing in the east.

But at the front in the Brest area tragic events had been happening for two days.

Brest fell to the enemy in the first few hours of war. Morning came with bombs and shells bursting in the streets, buildings collapsed in flames, German saboteurs were firing from attics, low-flying aircraft strafed civilian refugees fleeing from the town, the roads were strewn with unburied corpses and the municipal hospital was overflowing with the wounded. The municipal authorities and army headquarters were obliged to withdraw eastwards, in the direction of Kobrin. Soon, however, the Moscow Road was blocked by advancing German forces, and submachine-gunners who had crossed the Mukhavets appeared in the southern districts of the town. In the burning streets murder and pillage were practised freely by the Hitler troops and the criminals they had released from prison.

Here and there groups of armed Brest Communists tried to organize resistance, but most of them were immediately broken up or destroyed by the German submachine-gunners. There were only two centres of resistance in the town that the enemy failed to crush without a long struggle.

The battle for the Regional Military Commissariat lasted several hours. Early in the morning, thirty or forty workers of Party and Soviet organizations had come to the Commissariat with their families. Arms and ammunitions were issued, doors and windows barricaded, and under the command of Regional Military Commissar Stafeyev the men took up defensive positions all round the building. As soon as they broke into the town, the Germans attacked the Military Commissariat. German soldiers crawled up to the building and tossed hand grenades through the windows; bombs from the Junkers circling overhead fell dangerously close. Some of the defenders were killed, others wounded, and the Commissariat doctor scarcely had time to treat their injuries. Then Commissar Stafeyev was seriously wounded, but though unable to stand, he continued to direct the fighting.

The position was hopeless and at midday the defenders decided to try and get the women and children out of the building, then fight to the last. But when the women and children emerged

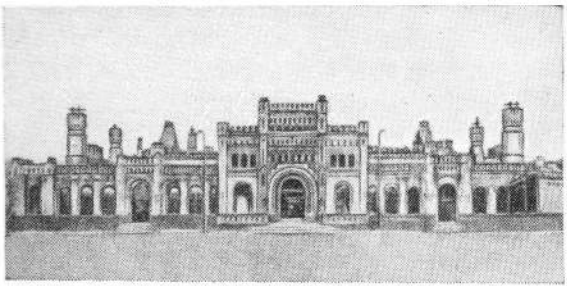
from the door carrying white flags, the enemy submachine-gunners opened fire on them and many were killed or wounded.

It was not until evening, when the last ammunition stocks ran out, that the Germans succeeded in overcoming the Commissariat's resistance. Commissar Stafeyev and other wounded were brutally murdered, part of the group was taken prisoner, and only a few succeeded in breaking through the enemy ring and escaping from the town through back alleys.

But an even more stubborn action was fought in the northern district of Brest, at the station.

On the evening of Saturday, June 21, a small contingent of air-force men on their way to Pruzhani arrived at Brest Station. There were two platoons of them, about fifty men, commanded by Sergeant-Major Basov. The military commandant was unable to send them off to their destination on an evening train and the men were allowed to spend the night in the station building.

As soon as the bombs started dropping, Sergeant-Major Basov mustered his men and posted them round the station in order to provide protection for any trains that might be departing eastwards. The air-force men had very few cartridges, but a supply of ammunition, that had belonged apparently to the semi-military railway

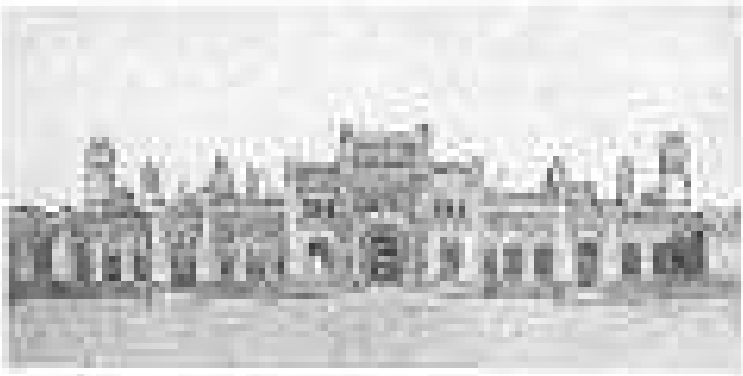


Brest Station

guard, was discovered in one of the cellars under the station. Basov's group would now be able to hold out for a long time.

In a short time the group was joined by several frontier guards who had retreated from the Bug. Soon afterwards a German motor cycle detachment appeared on the road leading to the station. The defenders allowed them to come nearer, then destroyed the greater part of the column with withering fire.

The motor cyclists were followed by armoured carriers with submachine-gunners. More and more enemy forces arrived and Basov's little force was obliged to withdraw to the station building, where several hundred refugees had gathered in the hope of getting away on an east-bound train.



Rose Hôtel

guard, was dispersed to one of the cellars under the station. Basin's group would now be able to hold out for a long time.

In a short time the group was joined by several frontier guards who had retreated from the Big Seen. Soon afterwards a German motor-cycle detachment appeared on the road leading to the station. The defenders allowed them to come within 200 metres of the station and then opened fire.

The motor-cyclists were followed by armoured cruisers with automatic-gunners. More and more enemy forces arrived and Basin's little force was obliged to withdraw to the station building, where several hundred refugees had gathered in the hope of getting away in an eastbound train.

German aircraft circled overhead dropping bombs and the building was gradually destroyed. It was obvious that a stand could not be made in the station building. On the other hand, the extensive cellars offered good protection from the bombing and provided opportunities for all-round defence. Everyone in the building went down into the darkness of the cellars. Basov stationed machine-guns and riflemen at the basement windows and when the enemy attempted to storm the building they were driven back with heavy losses by the confident and accurate fire of the defenders. The Germans were forced to start a proper siege, for the station cellars had become a small fortress in themselves.

The position of the defenders was, however, very serious. They had scarcely any food. There was not enough food in the station buffet to feed this mass of people for even a day. Sergeant-Major Basov therefore decided that all civilians must leave the cellars and surrender. An exception was made for the Communists, who were given arms and joined the ranks of the defenders.

A long and exhausting struggle began. The Germans broke into the station but failed to reach the cellars. From every hole and corner the defenders kept a close watch on the move-

ments of the enemy, and every day dozens of the invaders fell under the bullets of Basov's men.

Every day the German commanders appealed to the station defenders through loudspeakers, offering them surrender and promising them their lives. But the only answer they received was a volley of shots.

On the third or fourth day the Germans tried to flood the cellars. Hoses were brought into action and it was not long before Basov and his men were up to their waists in water. But they went on firing, and soon the Germans were forced to give up their plan because the town water supply failed and there was nowhere near enough for them to draw sufficient water to fill the cellars to ground level.

Then the enemy had a fresh idea. Having blocked the cellar doors and all the air vents they could find, they forced poison gas into the cellars. But although many of the defenders were suffocated, those who survived continued the unequal struggle.

An attempt to flood the cellars with petrol and set fire to them was also unsuccessful. In the end the Nazis decided to fill the cellars with sewage, which they brought to the station in lorries.

The ghastly struggle continued for over two weeks. In almost complete darkness the starv-

ing exhausted men waded about up to their waists or necks in the foul-smelling liquid, but did not drop their rifles and continued to answer the enemy's surrender offers with fire. During lulls in the fighting they heard the boom of artillery and the crackle of rifle-fire coming from the fortress, and the knowledge that their comrades not far away were also putting up a stubborn fight gave them fresh strength in their agony.

In the first days of July, Basov and a small group of men made an attempt to break through the enemy ring. At night they broke one of the doors which the Germans had barricaded and got above ground. The men who had remained below heard hand grenades bursting overhead and a crackle of firing. None of the group returned and it was never known whether Basov and his men managed to break through, or were killed in the uneven struggle.

By the tenth of July only a few men were left alive in the cellars. One night, wearing the civilian clothes of the Brest townspeople who had died there, the last defenders of the station cautiously emerged from the cellars, slipped through the enemy lines under cover of darkness, and by forest and marsh made their way eastward to the front-line. Thus the heroic struggle ended.

Meanwhile the front was growing more and more distant every day. The Soviet troops, most

of whom had only just been mobilized and were new to fighting, had been knocked off their balance by the enemy's surprise attack and could not hold the onslaught of the splendidly armed and battle-hardened German armies. In spite of the stubborn, heroic resistance put up by individual units and formations, the front had caved in now at one point, now at another, the retreating armies had been surrounded, and Guderian and Gott's divisions were already deep in the Soviet rear and trying to squeeze the pincers shut behind the Soviet forces as they fought their way back from the frontier zone. Every day the enemy armies penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of the country, and it was to take many long months of struggle and all the strength and will of the Communist Party, the army and the Soviet people to halt the enemy, and when they did halt them it was in winter, far to the east, at the gates of Moscow.

But that future victory at Moscow, like all the Soviet Army's subsequent victories, was forged in those tragic and heroic days of 1941 on the land of Byelorussia, the Baltic coast, and the Ukraine. And the men who forged it were the hundreds and thousands of nameless heroes who fell in battle, who fought fiercely in encirclement, who battled their way through the enemy rear to the front-line or retreated with

the mass of the army fighting desperate rear-guard actions into the heart of the country. Their bullets and grenades, their shells and mines, their retaliatory blows at the enemy destroyed the first hundreds of thousands of foreign invaders—the cream of Hitler's army—and thus laid a solid foundation for future victory.

The struggle was waged not only throughout the length of that enormous front, it was waged in depth, from the lines reached by the advanced German tank divisions right back to the frontier zones, where surrounded forces were still fighting, and where the first detachments of partisans were already preparing for action.

Battle outpost of the huge Land of Soviets, foremost bastion of our defence, the little garrison behind the walls of the old Russian fortress on the bank of the Bug, went on fighting with unparalleled determination and courage.

DAYS AND NIGHTS OF BATTLE

All through the first night, by the pale glittering light of rocket-flares, silent but intensive work was carried on in the fortress. The enemy artillery was nothing more than an occasional nuisance, the submachine-gunners' attacks had ceased, and on some sectors the Germans had even withdrawn beyond the earthworks. Taking advan-

age of this respite, the garrison commanders, who realized that an even fiercer onslaught was to be expected the next day, inspected their defences, positioned their men and distributed arms and ammunition as their stocks allowed. In the dry earth, scorched by the sun and the fire of war, the men hastily buried their fallen comrades. Weapons and ammunition were collected from dead enemy troops, fresh supplies of arms were unearthed from ruined magazines and storehouses.

Neighbouring units which had been cut off from each other during the day by the enemy submachine-gunners in the fortress were now able to renew communications and make plans for synchronized action on the following day. Lieutenant Anatoly Vinogradov of the 455th Rifle Regiment, who had been holding the north section of the circular barracks with a handful of men, established contact with Regimental Commissar Fomin. Captain Ivan Zubachov, who had commanded the defence in the 44th Regiment's sector in the western part of Central Island, also sent Fomin a messenger.

With the coming of darkness a regrouping of the Soviet forces took place in the area of the Terespolsky Gate. The frontier guards led by Lieutenant Kizhevatov abandoned their ruined outpost and joined up with the men of the 333rd.

Captain Ivan Zubachov

Then Andrei Kizhevatov co-operated with lieutenants Potapov and Sanin in commanding the defence on this sector. That night the commanders sent out messengers in the direction of the 84th Regiment and before long a telephone cable linked them with Regimental Commissar Fomin, who had set up his headquarters in the cellar of the White Palace. True, it was not a very reliable link and did not last long, for the next day it was continuously cut by German shells bursting in the yard of the citadel.

The tired defenders hardly slept that night, taking it in turns to snatch a doze while their comrades watched vigilantly to see that the enemy did not creep up under cover of darkness and launch a surprise attack. But that night, apparently, the German commanders had decided to rest their infantry, which the day's fighting had driven

Captain Ivan Zdravkov

The Serbian Fleet-vessels accompanied the Serbian Patrols and Scouts in surrounding the Palace on the night. That night the commanders were not present in the direction of the Serbian Regiment and before long a detachment of light Horse was sent to General Constantinovitch's, who had set up his head-quarters in the cellar of the White Palace. Here it was not a very reliable line and did not last long, for the next day it was overthrown and by German shells bursting in the yard of the Palace.

The first defenders, Lieutenant Gligorijević, taking it at once to attack a few while they remained, watched vigilantly to see that the enemy did not creep up under cover of darkness and launch a surprise attack. Intelligence reported by the German counter-spies, and decided by next day's battle, which Gligorijević's fighting had driven

to the point of utter exhaustion. The enemy reinforced their depleted assault detachments, brought up fresh forces, evacuated the wounded; and they, too, buried their dead. The night passed in comparative quiet.

But in the morning it started all over again, with redoubled force. At the first glimmer of dawn the enemy artillery, which was now stationed all round the fortress, began pouring shells into the ring, while dive-bombers screamed down on the defenders. Again everything was wrapped in smoke, again fires broke out in various places, and rifles and machine-guns cracked and chattered all along the line. The storm of the fortress had begun anew.

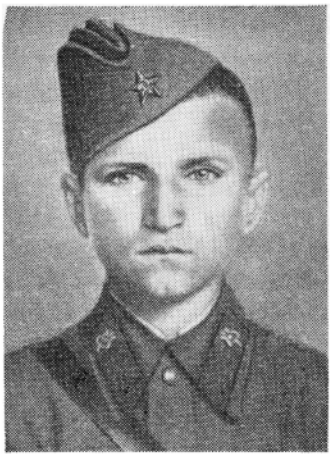
Again, just as on the day before, groups of submachine-gunners crossed the earthworks, penetrated into the northern sector of the fortress and made persistent attacks on Central Island. Enemy forces gained the north bank of the Mukhavets and took up positions in the bushes on both sides of the bridge leading to the triple-arch gate. From here their machine-guns kept the windows and firing slits of the barracks under constant fire, and several times submachine-gunners forded the branch channel of the Mukhavets and gained a foothold on the eastern tip of Central Island. Then Matevosyan, whom Commissar Fomin had entrusted with the defence of this sector,

led bayonet charges from behind the wall of the White Palace.

Through the thunder of firing a ringing bugle call would sound the signal for attack, a harsh drum roll would beat in time with the rattle of machine-guns as bugler and drummer went into the attack with the charging infantry. The mere sight of those haggard, grim-faced men, covered in dirt and powder-smoke, their eyes inflamed by the smoke and lack of sleep, struck terror into the enemy. Their rousing cheer and furious bayonet thrust never failed to put the enemy to flight, and all attempts to capture the north-east end of Central Island ended in the loss of many submachine-gunners.

The enemy continued to attack the barracks from South Island, through the Kholmsky Gate. But Commissar Fomin's men met these attacks with accurate fire from windows on the ground and upper floor. Now they had not only machine-guns and rifles. In one of the magazines that had survived the bombardment a stock of submachine-guns had been found and issued at once to some of the infantry. In this magazine the regimental artillerymen had discovered a small supply of mortar shells and had now opened fire from the windows on the enemy's positions in the vicinity of the hospital. A kind of shooting match was in progress. The artillerymen were firing at

a big flag with the swastika on it which had been hoisted on the hospital roof. The Nazis had hoisted the flag twice and twice the Soviet artillerymen had shot it down.



Bugler Petya Klipa, 1941

That day submachine-guns and mortars also appeared in the 333rd Regiment. The previous day the regiment had almost exhausted its supplies of ammunition. During the night they had succeeded in collecting a few German submachine-guns and cartridge clips. But these would not have lasted long and the men were wondering grimly what would happen when their ammunition ran out altogether.

And suddenly the situation was saved by young Petya Klipa, a bugler in the regiment's band.

Petya was fourteen, but he looked too small to be more than ten or twelve. He was a nippy

Regular Private Klijn, 4th

a big flag with the swastika on it which had been presented to the battalion. The Nazis had hoisted the flag before and below the Soviet artillerymen had cut it down.

That day sub-machine-guns and mortars were issued to the 525th Regiment. The previous day the regiment had already received its supplies of ammunition. During the night they had succeeded in collecting a few German submachine-guns and cartridge clips. But these would not have lasted long and the men were wondering grimly what would happen when their ammunition ran out altogether.

And suddenly the silence was broken by young Petya Klijn, a fighter in the regiment's band.

Petya was fourteen. As he looks the years to be more than ten or twelve. He was a ragged

little fellow with a quick brain and so much pluck that he was the darling of the regiment.

After losing his father, a veteran Communist railway-worker from Bryansk, when he was quite small, he had gone away to the army to join his elder brothers. His brother Lieutenant Nikolai Klipa was commander of the regiment's band and Petya had been enrolled as a bugler. Dressed up in a new Red Army uniform, which he wore with all the pride of a small boy, he went about with perfect military bearing and everyone in the fortress knew and loved the quick-witted little soldier.

On the Saturday evening, Lieutenant Nikolai Klipa had gone off as usual to his quarters outside the fortress and when war broke was unable to rejoin his unit. By chance Petya happened to spend the night in the bandsmen's barracks with his friend, sixteen-year-old Kolya Novikov, also an adopted son of the regiment. They were both in the fortress on the night of the attack.

Although stunned by a shell-burst in the first few minutes, Petya did not lose courage when he opened his eyes and saw what was going on around him. Only half-dressed and with blood on his face, Petya snatched up a gun and got ready to meet the enemy with such determination that the officers held him up as an example

to some of the grown men who had lost their heads.

Quickly recovering from his shell-shock, Petya set about carrying out his commanders' orders. Crouching at a window on the upper floor, he watched the enemy's movements and reported on them to Lieutenant Savin. When he was sent out on patrol, he made his way into the most dangerous sectors, usually accompanied by his older friend Kolya Novikov. And when the Germans broke into the citadel and the hand-to-hand fighting started, Petya joined in and fought boldly against grown men.

At dawn on the second day the boys asked Senior Lieutenant Potapov's permission to make a reconnaissance. They were sent out with the task of reconnoitring the position of enemy machine-gun nests on the bank of the Bug.

Petya made his way through the cellars to a window looking out on the Terespolsky Gate and, leaving his friend inside, cautiously lowered himself out of the window. It was a run of about fifteen yards over open ground to reach the gate. Petya made a dash for it but a burst from a submachine-gun in the gate tower ahead brought him up short. It was too late to turn back and Petya dodged quickly into the nearest barrack doorway by the gate.

The building turned out to be the frontier guards' stables, a long row of sheds joined by a passage down the centre. As he went from one stable to the next on his way to the western end of the island, Petya suddenly came across a store of arms and ammunition. New submachine-guns liberally smeared with grease (they had only recently been brought to the fortress) lay on neat shelves; boxes of cartridges, hand grenades and mortar shells were piled on top of one another. By some lucky chance, although the store was in the extreme western corner of the barracks, directly facing the enemy, it had remained untouched.

Petya ran back joyfully to his friend and five minutes later they were both reporting their find to the commander. A section of men was detailed at once and both boys went with them to bring back the ammunition, running across the stretch of open ground under fire from the German submachine-gunner in the tower. The two boys were heroes of the day, and thanks to them the 333rd Regiment was able to hold its sector much longer.

It was the same boys who from the windows of the west barracks spotted a big pontoon bridge that the Germans had pushed out across the Bug during the night. Enemy infantry and heavily

loaded ammunition lorries were pouring across it.

The mortar platoon, who now had plenty of ammunition, opened fire on the bridge and their first shells smashed through the wooden planking and stopped the traffic. One of the lorries, damaged by the explosions, plunged into the water, another halted halfway across the bridge, blocking the road. The infantry crowded back towards the bank in panic, but the mortar shells followed them and black columns of smoke started leaping up among the crowd milling round the bridgehead. The German artillery tried to crush the mortars with answering fire, but they were well hidden in the barracks and the continued bombardment of the bridge prevented the enemy from crossing.

The fighting in the northern sector of the fortress was even more desperate than on the previous day. Gavrilov's companies, entrenched on the earthworks, beat off one attack after another, and all the attempts by enemy submachine-gunners to force the moat and scale the works ended in failure. After every attempt dozens of corpses were left on the bank of the canal and the survivors scrambled back to the cover of the bushes, where they had already dug an extensive system of trenches.

Sometimes tanks appeared from the bushes. The defenders allowed them to get close to the walls, then pelted them with grenades. One of the tanks was crippled and the Germans were forced to tow it back.

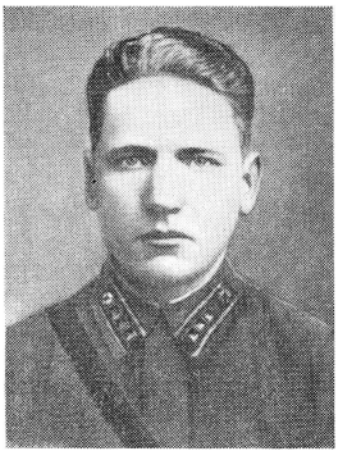
But one group of tanks did nevertheless succeed in breaking through the North Gate. Although the accompanying infantry was driven back by the fire of Gavrilov's infantry, two or three tanks got past the officers' quarters, charged through the triple-arch gate and came out in the central yard of the fortress. One of them halted near the gate and started shelling the barracks at point-blank range.

It was then that two men appeared from a basement under the 333rd Regiment barracks. Senior Lieutenant Semenenko and an unknown artillery sergeant-major had decided to do battle with the German tank.

The guns of the 333rd Regiment had been standing parked on the square just in front of the basement before the war started. By now most of them had been smashed by German shell-fire, but one was still intact and the two men had decided it could be used against the German tank, especially as there was a crate of shells lying close by.

Ignoring the German mortar shells bursting in the yard, Semenenko and the sergeant-major

worked feverishly to train the gun on the tank. The gun sights had been smashed, but the sergeant-major aimed with the barrel. Semenenko rammed the first shell into the breech. The gun fired and black smoke spirted from under the tracks of the tank.



Senior Lieutenant
A. Semenenko, 1941

Apparently the Germans had spotted the gun, for the tank's turret began to turn in its direction. But the second shell was already in the breech, and before the tank's gunner could take aim, the shell burst on the turret and jammed it. Two more shells followed and the tank was crippled. The next moment mortar shells started bursting round the gun itself and the two volunteers ran for cover. But they had achieved their aim. The Germans took the tank in tow and dragged it back through the fortress gates.

Meanwhile a second group of tanks had ap-

Sergt. Lockhart,
V.C. Sanctuary Wood.

wicked ferocity to Walt the gun of the tank. The gun might have been smashed, but its armour-plate shield with the name Somerset resisted the first shell and the second. The gun fired and struck under the cradle of the turret.

Apparently the Germans had spotted Morgan, for the tank's turret began to turn in his direction. But the second shell was already in the breech, and before the turret's gunner could take aim the shell burst on the turret and jammed it. Two more shells followed and the tank was crippled. The next manœuvre was to storm the tank. The gun fired and the two volunteers ran for cover. But they had reckoned without him. The German took the tank in tow and dragged it back through the fortress gates.

Meanwhile a second group of tanks had ad-

peared at the main entrance gate, in the northern sector. They were engaged by Major Gavrilov's anti-aircraft gunners.

Heavy bombing had left the artillerymen with only one gun that could be fired. Their commander, though badly wounded, put on a rough dressing and stayed at the gun. When the first German tank appeared in the tunnel of the gate, he dragged himself to his feet to direct the firing.

The Germans did not notice the anti-aircraft gunners until they fired their first shot. The tank halted in the gateway and began firing rapidly. But before the German gunner could get the range, an accurate shot from the Soviet gun turned the tank into a smoking wreck, which effectively blocked the narrow gateway to the other tanks.

But the young lieutenant, who despite his wound had personally aimed the gun, paid for success with his life. Exhausted from loss of blood, he collapsed over the gun, and when his men reached him he was dead.

When his death was reported to Major Gavrilov, the major, who had witnessed the duel himself, summoned his chief of staff Kasatkin at once.

"Write a letter recommending that lieutenant for the posthumous award of Hero of the Soviet

Union. As soon as we are relieved, I will send it to headquarters."

But that letter, like many other documents, was lost during the fighting in the fortress, and even the hero's name remains unknown to this day.

Towards evening there was a lull and the enemy's bombardment of the fortress grew noticeably weaker. At this point the men on watch at the windows of the northern sector of the circular barracks saw a man dressed in the uniform of a Soviet officer appear on the far bank of the Mukhavets. The man darted out from under the earthworks, dashed down to the river, plunged fully dressed into the water and swam across the river. Apparently the enemy had not yet noticed him, for not a single shot was fired.

Thinking that this might be a trap, the riflemen at the windows kept the swimmer covered. The officer, realizing that he might be taken for an enemy spy, shouted as he reached the bank: "Don't shoot! I'm Soviet!"

The next moment he was running up the bank and, before the German machine-gunner stationed on the wall could open fire, had scrambled through one of the ground-floor windows into the safety of the barracks. The riflemen immediately surrounded him.

Those of them who served in the 44th Regiment recognized the officer as the head of the regimental N.C.O. school, Senior Lieutenant Vasily Bitko. Wet to the skin, but wearing full officer's uniform, even his sword belt and the Order of the Red Banner he had won in Finland, he stood before his men, gripping a pistol still warm from recent firing. Bitko had fought his way through the ring of enemy forces to the besieged garrison in order to take command of his unit.

The news of the senior lieutenant's feat in fighting his way alone through the siege-line was greeted with delight and admiration by the defenders. A cheer went up along the whole sector as one unit after another got to know of his arrival. Bitko quickly grasped the situation and went round his sector, repositioning his men and giving instructions to the N.C.O.s. The mere sight of this determined energetic officer gave the men fresh strength, inspired them with hope of relief in the near future, and strengthened their will to fight.

On the morning of the third day the Germans launched a powerful attack on the central barracks from the northern sector of the fortress. Heavy fighting went on round the bridge and the triple-arch gate. The attack was repulsed but Y.C.L. secretary Matevosyan was badly wounded

and had to be taken down into the cellar of the White Palace. The Germans withdrew and did not renew their assault, but before long Junkers roared over Central Island and carried out a long and methodical bombing attack on the barracks.

The defenders regarded bombing as a respite. As soon as aircraft appeared, the infantry attacks ceased and nearly the whole garrison was able to withdraw to the safety of the cellars. Only the machine-gunners remained at their post during air raids to make sure that the enemy had no opportunity of profiting by this relaxation of the defence.

On June 24, the air raid was a particularly long one and during this long "rest" the officers commanding the defence in the centre of the fortress were able to hold a conference. Having discussed the situation and taken the necessary decisions, the officers composed an order, which Lieutenant Vinogradov immediately copied down.

When the ruins of the fortress were searched after the war, these half-rotted sheets of paper were discovered under the rubble. They were the first clue to the identity of the men who in those grim days had undertaken command of the fortress.

"Order No. 1, June 24, 1941" stated that the situation demanded a unified command for

Order No. 1

further defence of the fortress, and that the officers attending the conference had decided to combine all their forces into a single group.

Order No. 1

Surely officers of the Fortress and East Gate are standing. The conference had decided to withdraw all their forces into a single group.

Captain Ivan Zubachov, the experienced second-in-command of the 44th Regiment, a veteran Communist, who had fought in the Civil War and against the White Finns, was entrusted with the command of this combined group. His political assistant was Commissar Fomin, and chief of staff, Senior Lieutenant Semenenko. The order also instructed all junior commanders to draw up a roll of their men and form them into platoons.

The order was never fully written. The air raid ended, enemy submachine-gunners hurled themselves into the attack and the officers hurried back to their units. The fighting that followed was so fierce that it became simply impossible to compile lists of the men in various units, for the composition and position of the Soviet forces kept changing in response to changing circumstances and the ever increasing onslaught of the enemy.

But although Order No. 1 was in many ways never fulfilled, and could not be fulfilled, it played an important part in the defence of the fortress. The organization of a unified command in the centre of the fortress strengthened the Soviet defence and made it more flexible.

The distant rumble of gun-fire in the east had long since ceased. The front had retreated hundreds of miles from the frontier. During lulls in the fighting at night a deep silence that is found only far behind the lines reigned over the fortress, interrupted occasionally by the pulsating drone of long-range bombers flying high overhead. But such lulls were rare. The artillery bombardment and infantry attacks continued unceasingly, day and night, for the enemy tried to give the defenders no respite, in the hope that, exhausted by continual fighting, they would soon capitulate.

Every day hope of relief grew fainter. But hope helped the men to live and fight, and they forced themselves to go on hoping and believing. From time to time a rumour would flash round the fortress that a Soviet offensive had started, and that Soviet tanks were approaching the Brest area. The news gave the men fresh energy and they would defend their lines with redoubled determination, and their counter-attacks would grow even fiercer. And although these rumours always turned out to be unfounded, they arose again and again, and were always believed without question.

One night a group of Soviet long-range bomb-

ers passed overhead; the men recognized them at once by the sound of their engines. And when muffled explosions sounded far away in the west, from a railway junction across the Bug, everyone realized that the Soviet aircraft were bombing the enemy's trains, and the fortress rejoiced. There were shouts of hurrah, some of the men opened fire on the enemy positions; the Germans began to get nervous, and their artillery immediately renewed its bombardment of the fortress.

On another occasion a Soviet fighter appeared over the fortress. No one knew how it got there from the distant front. The lone aircraft plunged suddenly out of the clouds, circled over Central Island and dipped its wings in welcome. The Soviet stars on the wings were clearly visible and such a mighty cheer went up from all over the fortress that it seemed the pilot himself must hear it despite the deafening roar of bursting shells and the noise of his own engine.

Then several Messerschmitts arrived from across the frontier and hundreds of eyes in the hushed fortress watched the Soviet fighter defending itself with short bursts as it made off eastwards, climbing higher and higher towards the safety of the clouds, until eventually all the aircraft melted into the sky. All that day the besieged garrison fought with even more than their usual tenacity, and even many of the wounded

crawled into the line with rifles in their hands. No one doubted that this lone aircraft had been sent by headquarters to encourage the defenders of the fortress and make them realize that help was not far away. Whatever the reason really was, the unknown Soviet pilot inspired the garrison with fresh strength and gave them faith in ultimate victory.

But time passed, no help arrived, and everyone realized that the situation at the front was still unfavourable for the Soviet armies. And although people still forced themselves to believe, every man knew at the bottom of his heart that the chances of success were growing thinner every day. If someone ventured to express his doubts aloud, however, his comrades were quick to shut him up. It became an unwritten law of the garrison not to speak of the difficulties of the struggle, or to permit the slightest doubt of victory.

We shall fight to the end, whatever it may be! That decision, though never written down and never spoken aloud, matured silently in the heart of every defender of the fortress. The little garrison, cut off as it was, receiving no orders from senior headquarters, knew and understood its task. The longer the fortress held out, the longer the enemy regiments besieging the fortress would take to reach the front. So the fight must be

waged even harder, they must win time, they must hold the enemy down here, deep in the rear, inflict as heavy losses as possible, and thus sap his power to advance. They must fight with even greater courage and persistence, and sell their lives as dearly as possible.

And they did fight with extraordinary desperation, displaying unprecedented tenacity and contempt of death.

Men who had been wounded several times remained in the firing line. Men in blood-soaked bandages joined in bayonet charges. Even the worst cases refused to leave their posts. If the wound was so serious that there was no strength left to fight, men often put an end to themselves in order to relieve their comrades of the burden of looking after them, and to prevent themselves falling alive into enemy hands. In those days a last shout was often heard: "Good-bye, comrades! Avenge my death!" followed by a shot.

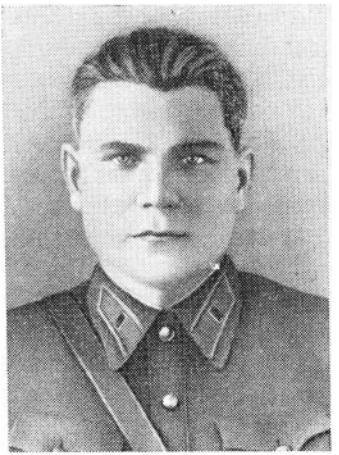
In the first days of the fighting in the northern sector of the fortress, near the officers' quarters the Germans captured a group of Red Army men commanded by a wounded battalion commander of the 125th Regiment, Captain Vladimir Shablovsky. Several women and children were taken prisoner at the same time. Among them were Shablovsky's wife and his four little daughters,

the eldest of whom was eight years old, while the youngest was only eight months.

The prisoners were marched back to the rear under a strong guard of submachine-gunners. The wounded, exhausted prisoners could scarcely walk and had to support one another. Shablovsky had one arm in a sling and was carrying his youngest daughter in the other. On the way the column had to cross a bridge. When the prisoners reached the middle of the bridge, the captain kissed his daughter, handed her to his wife, and with a shout to his men, "Follow me!" jumped over the bridge rail into the water. Several of his men jumped after him. The German submachine-gunners started firing madly and everyone who had jumped was killed in the water. But it was death they had sought. Wounded and exhausted as they were, they could never have been able to escape by swimming.

The death of Captain Shablovsky and his men made a strong impression even on the enemy. The Germans immediately turned the column round and marched it back to the town jail in Brest. And a day or two later, when a group of women and children who had been captured in the fortress was being led across the bridge, the elderly German soldier who was guarding them told them how the Russian captain and his men had died, and in his voice there could be heard

the respectful surprise of an enemy at the bravery of Soviet soldiers.



Captain Vladimir Shablovsky

Hitler's generals and their staffs directing the storming of the fortress were infuriated by the unexpected tenacity of the defenders. Their units were still stuck on the very first yards of Soviet territory, while the advance units of the German army had already captured Minsk and were moving on to Smolensk and Moscow. While on the front-line the advancing forces were competing for victory laurels, winning crosses and medals, and capturing rich trophies in towns and villages, here, at the walls of Brest Fortress, German officers were threatened not only by the accurate fire of Soviet snipers, but by the obvious displeasure of the High Command. Demands as to why the fortress had not yet been taken poured in from Hitler's headquarters, and every day

Captain Vladimir Shakhansky

the makeshift articles of an enemy of the bravery of Soviet soldiers.

Hitler's generals and their staffs directing the storming of the fortress were enfiladed by the unexpected tenacity of the defenders. Their tanks were still stuck on the narrow land yards of Soviet territory, while the advance units of the German army had already captured Minsk and were pressing on to Smolensk and Moscow. While on the front line the advancing troops were converting victory parade, shining crowds and medals, and capturing city trophies in scores and villages, here, at the walls of Brest Fortress, the German officers were humiliated and rebuffed by the incredible fire of Soviet snipers, but by the obstinate disobedience of the High Command. Demands as to why the fortress had not yet been taken poured in from Hitler's headquarters, and every day

the tone of these demands became more and more displeased and exasperated. But the fortress went on fighting, although the besiegers stopped at nothing to break the garrison's resistance.

More and more batteries were mounted on the bank of the Bug. The artillery bombardment now continued day and night, without a break. Mortar shells ploughed up every inch of the fortress yard, scarring the brick walls of the barracks and tearing the iron roofs to ribbons. The enemy's heavy siege guns gradually reduced the fortifications to ruins. At an early stage in the battle the Germans began using incendiary shells, and soon these were supplemented by flame-throwers. Aircraft dropped tanks of petrol as well as bombs and from time to time parts of the fortress were turned into a sea of fire.

Walls that had provided a refuge for the defenders gradually crumbled to smoking ruins, where it seemed no living creature could exist. But before long machine-guns and rifles would speak up again from the debris and those of the defenders who had been left alive, though wounded and suffering severely from burns, would continue the struggle.

At night the enemy sent groups of saboteurs up to the barrack walls. Dragging boxes of explosives, they tried to crawl up to the buildings held by the defenders and mine them. Sapper

groups crept along the fortress roofs, dropping charges of dynamite down the chimneys. Hand-to-hand fighting broke out suddenly in the darkness of the attics, unexpected explosions were heard, and roofs and walls collapsed, burying the defenders. But though stunned, wounded and half crushed, they never dropped their weapons. This is how a German despatch described one of the sapper operations: "In order to eliminate flank attacks from the officers' quarters on Central Island, the 81st Sapper Battalion was sent out with instructions to clear the building. Explosives were lowered from the roofs to the level of the windows, and detonated by fuses. Shouts and groans were heard from the Russians wounded by the explosion, but they went on firing."

The enemy no longer hesitated to resort to the vilest methods of war in order to crush the defenders in the shortest possible time. Having captured the hospital and murdered the wounded it contained, a group of submachine-gunners put on hospital gowns and attempted to run across the bridge at the Kholmsky Gate. But Fomin's men spotted the trick in time and the attempt failed. On another occasion, the enemy troops attacking on this sector drove a crowd of nurses captured in the hospital ahead of them. And when Soviet machine-gunners stationed on the upper floor repulsed even this attack, the fascists

themselves shot the women behind whose backs they had been unable to shelter. In an assault on the East Fort the fascists drove Soviet prisoners in front of their lines and the defenders of the fort heard the prisoners shouting: "Shoot, comrades, shoot! Don't spare us!"

From the very first the enemy tried to send spies dressed as Soviet officers and men into the fortress. Sometimes they were provocateurs, who pretended they had escaped from German prison camps and started all kinds of rumours in an attempt to spread panic among the defenders. Sometimes they were saboteurs, who waited for chances of shooting our men treacherously in the back. But before long the Soviet troops learned to recognize these pretenders and they were quickly caught and shot.

Every day after the bombing raids small aircraft appeared over the fortress, dropping pamphlets. Printed in Berlin before the war, these pamphlets stated that German troops had taken Moscow, that the Red Army had capitulated, and that further resistance was useless. Later the aircraft began dropping pamphlets appealing directly to the garrison. The Nazi commanders gave credit to the bravery and determination of the defenders, tried to prove the futility of further struggle, and offered the garrison "honourable surrender." But the fortress' only answer

to these appeals was gun-fire. One day the riflemen of the 84th Regiment's sector shot down an enemy aircraft that had been dropping leaflets. On another occasion Fomin's infantrymen collected two or three dozen of these pamphlets and Sergeant-Major Meier, a Volga German, drew on each one a pig with a Hitler moustache and wrote underneath: "Fascist pigs won't get into the Soviet garden!" A group of Young Communist Leaguers went out on the hunt and soon the regiment had a German prisoner at its disposal. He was then plastered from head to foot with the pamphlets and sent back in this condition to his own lines.

During the rare lulls in the firing, German loudspeakers could be heard in various parts of the fortress. They, too, broadcast appeals to the garrison, calling on them to lay down arms and promising those who surrendered "good treatment, food, and care for the wounded." But as the days went on the tone of these broadcasts grew more and more threatening, and ingratiating appeals gave way to menacing ultimatums giving the defenders half an hour or an hour for consideration, after which the enemy threatened to "wipe the garrison off the face of the earth and grind its defenders into the dust." But even these threats were answered by shots, and on one occasion a banner was hung out over the North

Gate with the words written in blood: "Though we all die, we shall not surrender the fortress!"

The Germans' usual practice after broadcasting an ultimatum was to stop bombarding the fortress so that a dead silence ensued, broken only by the loud voice of the announcer saying at intervals: "Ten minutes left!" "Five minutes left!" And as soon as the time expired, the fortress would be subjected to a squall of fire from German field guns and mortars, combined with fierce bombing by enemy aircraft.

The enemy began using heavier and heavier bombs, capable of smashing even the strongest fortress buildings, and in the deep cellars where the garrison sheltered, the concrete floors cracked and people bled at the nose and ears from the blast of the explosions.

The Germans carried out a particularly fierce raid on June 29, using the heaviest bombs.

That morning inhabitants of Brest noticed German officers standing on the roofs of many high buildings in the town, observing the fortress through binoculars. The fascists had already boasted to the townspeople that today the fortress would be hoisting the white flag. Scores of bombers were roaring over the fortress; the next moment the whole town was shaken from end to end by deafening bomb explosions and walls even in the town cracked as from the shock of an

earthquake. The whole fortress was enveloped in smoke and dust and the observers far away saw huge trees fly high into the air, torn up with their roots by the explosions. It seemed indeed as if no living creature could survive such a raid.

But when the raid ended and the smoke and dust cleared, the officers on the roofs peered in vain through their binoculars. Nowhere among the ruins was a white flag to be seen. It might have been assumed that there was no living soul left to hoist it, but a few minutes passed and again the chatter of machine-guns and the crack of rifle-fire was heard. The men who in some unbelievable way had survived this hurricane of bombs were continuing the fight.

IN A RING OF FIRE

Annihilating air raids, ceaseless shelling and machine-gun fire, growing infantry attacks, the immense numerical and technical superiority of the enemy, all contributed to make the heroic garrison's task supremely difficult. But these were hardships of a military nature, the inevitable lot of the soldier, something for which he is prepared beforehand. The only difference was that here they had assumed extreme proportions.

From the very first days of siege, however, to these hardships were added hardships of a differ-

ent nature, which placed the garrison in unprecedentedly grave conditions. It was not merely a matter of fighting; the whole life of the besieged garrison demanded a superhuman concentration of both physical and moral strength. It is these peculiar conditions that lend the epic defence of the Fortress of Brest its exceptionally heroic and tragic character, that have made it a unique page in the history of the Great Patriotic War.

The courage of the defenders of Odessa and Sevastopol, the iron steadfastness of the Leningraders, the heroic deeds of those who took part in the great Battle of Stalingrad, the victorious Soviet offensives of 1944-45, all these glorious achievements of the Soviet Army will remain for ever in the minds of men as unsurpassed examples of military valour. But the truly splendid fighting qualities that the Soviet soldier displayed in these battles and that gave him the reputation of being the best soldier in the world, would have been unthinkable but for that harsh school of experience through which the Soviet forces passed in the first months of the war. In hundreds of rearguard actions, in large-scale battles and small skirmishes, their courage was tempered, and their military skill was developed to a high level of perfection; tasting the bitterness of defeat, they toughened their will to fight, and on the arduous and grim roads of retreat their hearts filled with

that sacred hatred of the invader without which future victory would have been impossible.

In the ring of siege, under a hail of shells and bombs, the fortress was, in its way, a little Odessa, and a little Sevastopol. Like the heroic people of Leningrad, the fortress defenders endured unbearable privations and went on fighting. They stood to the death on the ruins of the fortress and fought with the bitter determination of the heroes of Stalingrad.

But every day and every hour Odessa and Sevastopol, Leningrad and Stalingrad were aware of being vitally and indissolubly linked with the rest of the country. The whole of the great Motherland was with them, the eyes of the whole nation were watching them, the will of the great Communist Party constantly inspired them in their unequal struggle, and all their actions were guided firmly and confidently by the Supreme Command. The whole country strove to see that the garrisons of the heroic blockaded cities did not run short of supplies. Press and radio kept the whole world informed of their heroic struggle, and the names of the valiant were on every lip.

The defenders of Brest Fortress had none of all this. In this, the nation's direst hour, when the heart of every Soviet man was filled with anxiety for the fate of the Motherland, a wall of fire and death shut off the little garrison fighting on the

frontier, and the only news that reached it from outside were the falsified bulletins of the German pamphleteers and German radio propagandists, claiming the destruction of the Soviet Army, the fall of Moscow, and the capitulation of the Soviet Union. They received no orders from their headquarters, no supplies were dropped to them from the air, nothing was written about them in the papers and the rest of the country did not even know they were still fighting. Thoughts of the Motherland, of their comrades who had retreated eastwards, of their relatives and dear ones were accompanied by an agonizing sense of uncertainty. Thoughts of what lay ahead for them offered nothing but death, shame, and humiliation in an enemy prison; and involuntarily they found themselves thinking that perhaps no one would ever learn of their heroic struggle, and even their names would remain unknown to the people. And yet they went on fighting, because the Motherland, from which they were cut off by the enemy, lived in the heart of every man in the garrison. They fought not for glory, not even for their own lives, they were simply carrying out their duty to their country, with a deep faith that sooner or later the enemy would be driven from their native land.

Even a front-line veteran, who has experienced the fiercest battles of the war, finds it hard to imagine the unbelievably difficult circum-

stances in which the Brest garrison had to fight from start to finish.

Every yard of soil had been ploughed and re-ploughed by bombs and shells. The air was alive with the whistle of bullets and shrapnel, and the thunder of explosions scarcely ceased, day or night; and the brief stillness that fell after the delivering of a routine ultimatum was even more awe-inspiring than the constant bombardment to which the garrison was accustomed.

Incendiary bombs, shells, flame-throwers, petrol tanks dropped from aircraft did their work. Everything that could burn in the fortress burned. The fires that broke out at dawn on June 22 were not extinguished for over a month, dying down in one place only to break out afresh somewhere else, and on calm days a dense pall of smoke hung immovably over the fortress.

For several days the vehicles of a transport battalion burned on the square in front of the west barracks, where the men of the 44th Regiment were fighting, and the men were suffocated by the acrid fumes of burning rubber. In the north-west section of the circular barracks a big clothing store was set on fire and the smoke from it was so unbearable that the men of the 455th Regiment holding the neighbouring section of the barracks were compelled to put on respirators

Fire penetrated even to the cellars The tem-

perature raised by the conflagration overhead was so great in parts of the cellars that cracks appeared in the brick walls. And as soon as the bombardment started, the blanket of smoke was mixed with dry hot dust raised by the explosions and the pungent smell of cordite. The smoke and dust parched the men's throats and mouths and filtered deep into their lungs, causing agonized coughing and unbearable thirst.

The summer days were hot and every day the stench of decay became more and more revolting. At night the defenders crawled out of their shelters to clear away the corpses. But there were so many dead that they could be covered with no more than a thin layer of earth, and the next day the sun continued its work of destruction; and only now and then, when a breeze sprang up, did that terrible atmosphere of decay disperse a little and allow the men to gasp in the fresh air.

There were other, even more terrible privations.

There was not enough food. Nearly all the food stores had been destroyed or burned in the first hours of the war. But some time passed before the loss made itself felt. At first, the intense nervous strain of fighting destroyed appetite. Only on the second day did people start looking for food. Something was salvaged from the ruined stores, and a small supply of food was discovered in the regimental messes. But much more was needed to

feed the garrison, and every day the agony of hunger increased. Sometimes, when searching the bodies of dead enemy soldiers, the defenders found biscuits, sugar, or a bar of chocolate in their field bags, but most of what was found was given to the wounded and the women and children sheltering in the cellars. A barrel of butter was discovered in the small pantry near the 44th Regiment's kitchen; it lasted for two days. On the third day the men of the 84th Regiment discovered half a sack of damp peas among the ruins of the mess and, on Fomin's orders, the peas were carefully counted and shared out to each man. Then the garrison began to eat the meat of the horses that had been killed, but before long the heat deprived them even of this kind of food. People turned into living skeletons, their hands and legs were mere bones tightly covered with skin, but those hands still gripped their weapons and hunger could not destroy their will to fight.

Medical supplies of all kinds ran short. On the first day there had been so much blood and wounds that all the bandages and field dressing had been used up. The women tore up their underclothes for bandages; sheets and pillow cases were treated in the same way. But still there was not enough to go round. People coverod their wounds with anything they could find, or simply left them to bleed and went on fighting. A splinter from a

Ranker Nikolai Gaivoronsky

German mortar shell slit open the stomach of ranker Nikolai Gaivoronsky. His comrades bound up the terrible wound with a shirt and Gaivoronsky remained in the line for three weeks and even took part in bayonet charges. In the basement under the 333rd Regiment's barracks there was a wounded frontier guard Bobryonok, who had been severely shell-shocked. Though he kept losing consciousness, he held on to his rifle and, when consciousness returned, he would crawl to the window and fire at the attacking forces until he fainted again.

There was nothing to change bandages with and dozens of badly wounded men died of gangrene and blood-poisoning. Even so, some of the wounded stayed in the line despite loss of blood and agonizing pain.

The medical workers in the garrison did all

Marker Michl Gabrowski

German market stall-holders open the street of many Nissan Gutsmensky. His comrades heard up the terrible sound with a shirt and Gabrowski remained in the line. In three weeks and went back past in bayonet charges. In the basement under the Hôtel Regnault's Antioch there was a wounded Russian guard Dobrynski who had been terribly shell-shocked. Though he kept losing consciousness, he held on to his rifle and, when consciousness returned, he would crawl to the window and try at the attacking forces until he fainted again.

There was nothing to charge bandages with and Dobrynski finally wrenched open one of his wounds and bled pressing from it some of the wounds stayed in the line despite loss of blood and agonizing pain.

The medical services in the garrison at all

they could to relieve the sufferings of the wounded and carried out their duty with heroic devotion.

Senior Assistant Surgeon Valentina Rayevskaya, 1941

Valentina Rayevskaya, a senior assistant surgeon of the 333rd Regiment, attended to the wounded under fire from the very first minutes of the war. Regardless of danger, she worked until she herself was seriously wounded by a shell splinter. Like many others, she was carried down to the cellars, where the officers' wives were attending to the wounded. But here, as everywhere else in the fortress, there were no spare bandages and no medicines, and the wounded suffered cruelly.

Again it was Petya Klipa, the fourteen-year-old bugler, who came to the rescue. He and his friend made their way under fire to the ruined store of a medical unit and under the rubble found a small stock of bandages and medicines. Dozens of

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Again it was Petya Klipa, the fourteen-year-old bugler, who came to the rescue. He and his friend made their way under fire to the ruined shop of a medical unit and under the rubble found a small stock of bandages and medicines. Dozens of

Assistant Surgeon Raisa Abakumova, 1941

wounded were saved from death thanks to the courage of this fourteen-year-old boy.

A real heroine of Brest Fortress was the young assistant surgeon Raisa Abakumova. As soon as the first shells fell, she picked up her medical bag, and leaving her old mother at home, ran to the bridge leading to Central Island, where the enemy fire was particularly heavy. The road to the bridge was strewn with wounded. German shells were bursting all round, the whine of bullets was mingled with the roar of aircraft overhead and the shriek of falling bombs, but Abakumova ran from one wounded soldier to another, applying dressings and carrying them to safety. She stopped only when the supply of dressings in her bag was exhausted.

Then she remembered that there were women and children in the officers' quarters close by and

Assistant Surgeon Nora Mclaughlin, 1901

wounded were cared for. Furthermore, in the course of this fourteen-month-old war...

A real heroine of Rizal Province was Assistant Surgeon Nora Mclaughlin. As soon as the first shots fell, she picked up her medical bag and, carrying her rifle, ran to the bridge leading to Corregidor Island. There the enemy fire was particularly heavy. The road to the bridge was strewn with wounded. German shells were bursting all around. The whole area was blighted with the roar of gunfire, cries of the wounded and the stench of lurking terror. But Mclaughlin ran from one wounded soldier to another, applying bandages and carrying them to safety. She stopped only after the struggle in Bataan in her area was exhausted.

Then she remembered that there were women and children in the officers' quarters close by and

ran to find them. She assembled the officers' wives and the children in the buildings nearby and led them to the walls of the East Fort not far away. They found shelter in one of the chambers of the fort and Major Gavrilov, who had taken command of this group, immediately instructed Raisa Abakumova and the women with her to organize care of the wounded.

The whole garrison knew this tall, handsome young woman, with the skilful, healing hands of a doctor. More than once she appeared in the forward area, regardless of bullets, dragging the wounded from under the enemy's very nose. In the little hospital that she organized in the fort, despite the absence of bandages and medicines she managed to find ways of alleviating suffering. The men's shirts were torn up for bandages, bits of board and broken rifle stocks were used for splints.

When the men discovered a small stock of ice in the nearby earthworks, Raisa Abakumova went there at once. It was a dangerous expedition, for to get there one had to crawl across open ground which was under fire from a German machine-gun. But Abakumova ran the gantlet several times in order to be able to use ice to quench the burning thirst of the wounded men.

Raisa Abakumova performed her duty as a doctor to the last. When many days later the fort's position became hopeless and the commanders decided to surrender the women and children as prisoners, she refused to go with them and stayed behind with her old mother, determined to share the fate of the wounded, whatever that might be.

Many were the intolerable trials that the defenders had to endure during the siege. But perhaps the worst trial of all for both wounded and able was the constant, maddening thirst. Strange though it may seem, but in a fortress built on islands, surrounded on all sides by rivers and canals—there was no water.

The water supply broke down in the first minutes of the German bombardment. There were no wells inside the fortress, and no stocks of water. On the first day it was possible to draw water from the Mukhavets and the Bug, but as soon as the enemy gained the banks, they set up machine-guns in the riverside bushes covering all approaches to the water. Now nearly all expeditions to fetch the precious water ended in the death of the brave men who undertook them, and thirst became the most terrible and insoluble of all the garrison's problems. Even at night it was extremely dangerous to crawl down to the river. The whole

bank was constantly lit up by rocket flares and the enemy machine-guns, alert as watch-dogs, opened up with fierce bursts of fire at the slightest rustle or movement in the riverside grass.

Yet at night some of the men managed to fetch water. Gripping the metal pail-handle in his teeth, the man would wriggle on his stomach towards the bank, freezing to the spot every minute a flare burst overhead. Pushing aside the enemy corpses floating thickly by the bank, he would carefully fill his pail, trying not to make a splash, and then crawl slowly and silently back the way he had come. And when he walked through the barracks with his precious burden, the men would try not to look at the water he had brought—they could not claim a drop of it. All the water went down into the cellars, for the children and the wounded, for whom the water, muddy and stained pink with blood, was measured out sparingly, a mouthful per person, in the top of a German flask.

But there was no water for those who remained in the line. Only as they rushed into a counter-attack, fording the Mukhavets under enemy fire, did a few of them manage to scoop up a mouthful or two. But all the rest of the time they were tortured by thirst, and the heat, dust and smoke

increased their torment tenfold. Their parched throats contracted chokingly, their mouths seemed to be made of dusty skin, their moistureless tongues grew unbearably rough and raw. Every breath of the hot air seemed to set their lungs on fire. And if one of the exhausted soldiers fell into a doze for a few minutes he dreamed of water, of rivers, lakes, oceans of cool healing water, and when wakened by firing or the nudge of a more alert neighbour, the realization that it had been only a dream would drive him to the verge of madness. And sometimes human strength could not endure the torture and men went mad from thirst.

In the cellars attempts were made with bayonets and knives to dig wells. But the holes fell in quickly and it was impossible to dig deep. In one such shallow well in the 84th Regiment's sector less than a saucepan of water could be drawn in the course of a whole day; it was not enough even for the seriously wounded. A deeper well was dug in the vicinity of the East Fort, but it turned out to be near a drain and the water was undrinkable.

People dreamed of rain as though it were an unheard-of miracle. Day after day the sky remained cloudless and the hot summer sun beat down on the earth, scorching it mercilessly.

Every day the tormenting thirst grew more and more intolerable.

But though these privations were terrible enough, it was even more terrible for the fighting men to witness the sufferings of the women and children. The officers who had their families with them watched in desperation as death by starvation and thirst came nearer every day to their children, wives and mothers. The men looked bitterly at the feeble wasted bodies of their children and were ready for any sacrifice to relieve their suffering. Most of the water or food was given to the children, and even the seriously wounded refused their meagre ration so that it could be given to the little ones.

Several times it was suggested to the women that they should take their children and surrender. But they flatly refused to do so as long as there was any chance of keeping the children alive. The thought of being prisoners of the fascists was as hateful to them as to the fighting men who were defending the fortress.

Near the fortress power station the fascists captured a group of women and children, among whom was the wife of Band Sergeant-Major Ivan Zenkin and his fourteen-year-old daughter Valya. Not far away Potapov and Kizhevatov's men were defending the 333rd Regiment's barracks.

Valya Zenkina, 1941

Before sending the prisoners back into the rear, a German officer, ignoring her mother's pleading, picked Valya out of the column, pointed to the barracks, from which rifle and machine-gun fire was coming, and ordered the girl to inform the defenders that if they did not surrender at once they would be "ground to dust." The officer pushed Valya out into the yard amid bursting shells and whistling bullets and the girl ran towards the building under fire.

Luckily the defenders noticed her and stopped firing. She reached one of the basement windows and was helped inside. The men took her at once to Senior Lieutenant Potapov and she told him of the Nazis' ultimatum.

No one, of course, thought of complying with the enemy's demand. But when Valya was told she could go back to the officer with the defend-

Valya Zvolkin, 1941

Before sending the prisoners back with Shevtsov, a German officer jokingly mutters, pointing at Valya, not at the veteran, pointed to the barracks, from which rifle and machine-gun fire was coming, and ordered the girl to inform the defenders that if they did not surrender at once they would be "ground to dust." The veteran named Valya and, shielding her with his body and shooting, Valya and the girl ran towards the building under fire.

Lagkida the defenders rallied her and stopped firing. She reached one of the basement windows and was helped inside. The man took her at once to Senior Lieutenant Kolapov and she told him of the Nazis' ultimatum.

No one, of course, thought of complying with the enemy's demand. But when Valya was told she could go back to the village with the delega-

ers' answer, she refused to go back. And although her mother was still a prisoner, the thought of being in fascist hands frightened the girl more than fire and shell. Valya felt better in the cellar with the fighting men, and so she stayed there, helping the women to tend the wounded.

The women dressed the soldiers' wounds, caring for the severe cases as tenderly as for their own children. Some women and even girls carried ammunition to the men under fire. And some even took up arms and fought shoulder to shoulder with their husbands, fathers and brothers.

The story has been preserved of a young Y.C.L. member Katya Tarasyuk, an officer's wife. A village schoolmistress by profession, she had come to the fortress not long before the outbreak of war to spend a holiday with her husband.

At first Katya remained with the other women, looking after the wounded in the cellar. Lieutenant Tarasyuk, her husband, and his men were repelling the enemy's attacks. When many of his men had been put out of action, Tarasyuk himself took over the heavy machine-gun. Positioning it at the foot of a big tree, Tarasyuk drove back one attack after another with cool, accurate fire. Mortars opened fire on the lone machine-gunner and soon there was little left of the tree but its scarred and twisted trunk. But though wound-

ed several times, Tarasyuk went on firing until he was killed by an enemy bullet.

The machine-gun was not silent for long. Tarasyuk's place was taken by one of his men. When Katya heard that her husband had been killed, she left the cellar and crawled to the splintered tree, where the gun was still firing. Before long the other machine-gunner was also killed. Then Katya herself lay down behind the gun-shield and fired at the enemy until mortally wounded by a shell splinter. That torn and splintered stump, where Katya died so heroically, has since been called by the citizens of Brest the "tree of war."

Women carrying rifles, pistols and grenades were to be found in various sectors of the fortress defences. And although the names of most of those heroines have remained unknown, we know that there were many who fought side by side with their husbands, and it is understandable why among the enemy troops who stormed the citadel there were rumours that a Soviet "women's battalion" was taking part in the defence of the fortress.

THE DEATH OF HEROES

The days passed, each one like its predecessor, in ceaseless shelling, ceaseless bombing, and ceaseless fighting. Every morning, as the sun rose

in the east behind a curtain of smoke and dust, hope stirred in the hearts of the defenders that perhaps this would be the last day of their ordeal, that today they would hear the long-awaited thunder of the Soviet Army's guns. And every evening, when the sun went down behind the bare trees of West Island that hope died with the light of day.

From the very first, however, the garrison had decided not to confine itself to passive waiting for relief, and not only to repel the enemy attacks but to try to break through the ring of besieging troops. Eastward beyond the town stretched the huge forests and impassable marshes of Byelorussia, and twenty or thirty miles north-east of the fortress began the dense thickets of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha. Could they but reach those forests, they would be able to carry on the struggle, become partisans and fight their way to the front.

Starting from June 24, attempts to make a break-through began on all sectors of the defence line. But the enemy ring was strong and the Germans were on the alert. Only a few small groups succeeded in getting out of the besieged fortress, and for the most part these night attacks were mown down by machine-gun fire and the survivors were forced to retreat to the barracks, with many of their comrades missing.

The most determined and organized attempts to break through were made in the sectors of the 44th and 84th regiments, under the command of Zubachov, Fomin, Semenenko and Bitko. It was decided to strike north and north-east and on June 24 the main defence force on Central Island was concentrated in the northern half of the circular barracks, on the bank of the Mukhavets. Only screening groups were left in the southern and western sectors, the club, and the White Palace.

On the evening of June 25 a battle order issued by the commanders of the combined group was read out to the officers and men fighting on the northern sector of Central Island. Lieutenant Vinogradov was commanded to form a vanguard detachment of 100-120 men to break through the siege ring on June 26 and head in the direction of the town. If this attempt was successful, the main forces of the garrison of the central fortress were to advance through the gap.

Lieutenant Vinogradov spent the whole night organizing his detachment. He was an experienced commander, who had been decorated for valour with the Order of the Red Banner in 1940. His actions in the early days of the defence had been skilful and decisive and he had already won considerable authority among the defenders.

At eleven the following morning Vinogradov's detachment began to concentrate at their starting positions near the triple-arch gate. Their movements were noticed by the enemy, who at once opened fire on the area with artillery. But Vinogradov skilfully found cover for his men. By noon everything was in readiness.

Lieutenant Anatoly Vinogradov, 1941

The lieutenant reported to Zubachov and Fomin and requested permission to begin the operation.

While machine-guns posted at the barrack windows fired at the German positions on the earthworks on the far side of the Mukhavets, Vinogradov led his men in a charge across the bridge. On reaching the earthworks, the detachment crushed the enemy's fire and immediately turned eastwards along the bank of the river. Though the detachment had to advance in the face of fierce resistance, it was soon outside the

Lieutenant Anatoly
Yevgrafov [illegible]

At eleven the following morning Yevgrafov's detachment began to [illegible] their leading positions near the Dubrovnitsa gate. They were [illegible] by the enemy, who at once opened fire on the area with artillery but Yevgrafov and [illegible] found cover for the men. By noon everything was in readiness.

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Mikin machine-guns posted at the barrack windows fired at the German soldiers on the earthworks on the far side of the Dubrovnitsa. Yevgrafov led his men in a charge across the bridge. On reaching the earthworks, the detachment crushed the enemy's fire and immediately turned eastward, along the bank of the river. Though the detachment was in advance of the line of Kotov battalions, it was soon outside the

fortress. Vinogradov was expecting the main forces to catch up with them any moment, but they had been held up and Vinogradov led his detachment on towards the east.

By seven in the evening the detachment, reduced to half its strength, came out on the southern outskirts of Brest, near the Moscow Road. German troops were moving along the road in a solid stream. It was still light and the enemy immediately spotted Vinogradov's detachment. Enemy infantry advanced on the detachment from all sides, their guns opened fire at point-blank range, and a force of about fifteen tanks attacked in the rear.

The detachment was caught in open country and could only defend itself by taking up positions in a circle. But the battle was too unequal and soon the detachment was almost completely destroyed. Vinogradov himself, stunned by an explosion, and a few of his men, who had fainted from their wounds, were taken prisoner.

The main force on Central Island did not succeed in following Vinogradov's detachment. The Germans quickly closed the gap with fresh forces and Zubachov and Fomin's detachment, which attempted to cross the Mukhavets, was thrown back with heavy losses.

But the idea of breaking out of the siege ring was not abandoned. The officers decided to or-

ganize an attempt under cover of night, and every night from then on attempts to break out of the fortress were made.

At the darkest hour of the night, just before dawn, two big detachments formed up on either side of the gate preparing to attack along the whole line of the northern barracks. One of the detachments was commanded by Regimental Commissar Fomin, the other by Senior Lieutenant Bitko. At the same time, a small force under Zubachov was stationed at the upper windows to give the attackers covering fire.

The rocket flares that were fired constantly from the opposite bank cast their glittering light on the still waters of the Mukhavets and the dark barrier of the earthworks beyond, held by the Germans. From time to time glittering lines of tracer bullets reached through the darkness towards Central Island and the chatter of a machine-gun was heard; sometimes a shell whined overhead and exploded with a crash in the fortress yard. At the windows looking out over the Mukhavets, and by the gate, the attack groups stood listening intently and watching the outline of the opposite bank as they waited for the order to attack. And when the order at last flashed down the line like an electric spark, the men hurled themselves across the bridge, or jumping out of the barrack windows, lifted their weapons above

their heads and waded rapidly across the river, their feet slipping on the muddy bottom. Not a shout was raised, nor a shot fired!

But they gained only a few seconds before the enemy spotted them by the light of the flares. Machine-guns sparked all along the top of the earthworks. The Mukhavets was lashed into foam by bullets and the bridge was swept with fire from two sides. Only then a fierce cheer went up from the attacking line and Zubachov's men at the barrack windows opened fire on the German positions on the earthworks.

There was no holding that first rush. Men drowned in the dark waters of the river, and fell on the bridge, but others raced on past dead and wounded through the hail of machine-gun fire, firing with submachine-guns and hurling grenades at the enemy on the earthworks. Once on the earthworks, the attackers brought their bayonets into play and soon the enemy fire was crushed all along the line.

But not far away, on the other side of the earthworks, German reinforcements were stationed. Fresh companies of submachine-gunners rushed to the wall and the enemy's numerical superiority immediately began to tell. The advance was checked and the detachment commanders, seeing that further attempts to move on would only result in useless and heavy losses, led the

remnants of their forces back across the river. Depressed by failure and the loss of their comrades, the men returned to their barracks. But the following night the attempt was repeated with even fiercer determination. And so it went on for several nights in succession, but every night the number of attackers grew less. The enemy brought more and more fresh forces up to the endangered sector and the ring of siege was strengthened. But though the cost was dear, these attempts were the last hope of the besieged garrison, and they expressed all the pent-up feelings in the hearts of the men—their violent, irrepressible hatred of the enemy and their burning desire to come to grips with him in mortal struggle.

The night came when everyone realized that further attacks would lead only to the complete annihilation of the garrison and thus hasten the capture of the fortress. The attack on the night of June 28 was repulsed with particularly heavy losses and scarcely half of the attacking force returned to the barracks. By the light of a rocket flare one of the men who was with Fomin noticed that the commissar's gaunt bearded face was wet with tears. The commissar, who day after day had maintained an attitude of calm assurance, which had invariably communicated itself to his men, now wept tears of anger and desperation, tears

born of the knowledge that he was helpless to save his men, of grief at the thought of those who had died, and of a gnawing anxiety for the fate of those who still remained alive.

No one else noticed those tears and the commissar quickly overcame his momentary weakness; soon his voice was heard again giving instructions in its usual calm tones. Even at the very end, when all hope of breaking out of the fortress was lost, and scarcely any faith that the garrison would be relieved remained, there was still an aim to fight for. That aim was to hold out as long as possible, keeping the enemy forces chained to the walls of the fortress, killing as many of them as possible and selling one's life at the highest price.

After that night all attempts to break through on the sectors of the 44th and 84th regiments were abandoned.

This decision was dictated not only by the garrison's heavy losses, but also by the shortage of ammunition. Cartridges and grenades, which were now unbelievably difficult to obtain, could be used more economically in defence.

The ammunition that had been found in half-ruined stores was quickly used up in repulsing the enemy's constant attacks. The defenders managed to drag supplies even from stores that were burning, where boxes of cartridges frequent-

ly exploded. Men even threw themselves into the flames and at the risk of their lives snatched boxes from the burning stacks. But the ammunition thus gained did not last long.

Every day the shortage of ammunition was felt more intensely. Every grenade, every cartridge was counted. If a man was killed without using his ammunition, his cartridges and grenades were at once taken by a comrade. At an early stage the defenders began taking the weapons and ammunition pouches from enemy corpses. Crawling forward under fire, the men felt every body in a German uniform and, in spite of the hunger and thirst that tortured them, their groping hands reached first not for the water bottle or the food that was sometimes to be found in the dead men's pockets. A pouch of cartridges, a submachine-gun and the German grenades with long wooden handles were what the men wanted most of all.

Gradually Soviet weapons became useless, there was no ammunition for them. Most of the defenders fought the enemy with his own weapons—German submachine-guns found on the battle-field or captured in counter-attacks. And the garrison had to make good their ammunition supplies by the same unusual method, which was probably used at no other time all through the war.

As soon as their stock of cartridges ran low, the defenders ceased fire and pretended to withdraw, actually taking cover in places where they could not be seen by the enemy. The enemy submachine-gunners would then advance cautiously, firing constantly at the windows. But the immense thickness of the walls made it difficult for them to look into the building and see what was happening inside, so they tossed grenades through the windows. The rooms were shaken by explosions and the flying splinters sometimes killed or wounded the men in their hiding places. But they were prepared for this and did not give their presence away. When at length the submachine-gunners were convinced that the garrison had quitted its positions, they would charge in through windows and doors uttering triumphant shouts. They were then attacked in a hand-to-hand struggle by the defenders, who destroyed them and took their weapons and ammunition.

Ammunition was often acquired in this way. But it was still not enough, for the enemy attacks increased continually, and knowing how difficult it was to replenish their supplies, the defenders were forced to husband every bullet and make sure that it found its mark. And once, when one of Fomin's men said in the commissar's presence that he was keeping his last cartridge for himself, Fomin replied, address-

ing them all: "No, friends, you must use even your last cartridge on the enemy. We can die in hand-to-hand fighting, every cartridge must be for them, for the fascists alone."

The Germans succeeded in occupying the greater part of the south-east barracks, which had been abandoned by the men of the 84th Regiment. A stubborn battle was waged for the club building and the White Palace, and both buildings changed hands several times. More and more often German tanks broke through the triple-arch gate into the yard of the central fortress. They drove right up to the barracks and fired point-blank at the windows, and sometimes they even forced their way into the building through the big storehouse doors on the ground floor. In the 455th Regiment's sector a fascist tank broke into a part of the barracks over the door of which a Soviet medical orderly had hung a large red cross, easily visible from a distance. Severely wounded men were lying on the concrete floor. A cry of horror went up from the wounded at the sight of the tank in the doorway. The tank stopped for a second, then roared forward over the prostrate bodies. When it reached the middle of the room, it suddenly braked and twisting round on its caterpillar tracks began mercilessly crushing the helpless men.

Stubbornly though the garrison resisted, the

enemy gradually overcame them. Every day the enemy's superiority became more and more overwhelming. Under these conditions there was no sense in keeping the women and children in the fortress any longer. Sooner or later they would inevitably die of thirst or starvation, or be killed by the heavy bombs that the enemy dropped on the fortress every day. However cruel the enemy might be, however bitter and humiliating it might be to be taken prisoner, there was still hope that the enemy might spare the women and children. For this reason it was decided to surrender them as prisoners.

When Lieutenant Kizhevatov, badly wounded but still in command of his men, came down into the cellar of the 333rd Regiment's barracks to tell the women of this decision, they began to protest.

"Don't give us up to torture," they pleaded with tears in their eyes. "The fascists will kill us anyway, and they'll torture us too. You'd better shoot us yourselves, and the children too."

But Kizhevatov was unbending and said that it was an order of the fortress commander.

"But what will you do yourselves?" one of the women asked him.

"We are bound by our oath of allegiance and we're going to carry it out to the last," Kizhe-

vatov replied. "Tell our people that, when they arrive."

Petya Klipa, since he was only a boy, was given the option of surrendering with the women and children. But he proudly refused, saying that he considered himself a Red Army man and would stay with his comrades to fight till the last.

He had already shown himself to be a good shot, and had more than one fascist to his credit, and he had distinguished himself both in hand-to-hand fighting and on patrol. His request was granted and he was allowed to stay behind.

The men rigged up a white flag and the women, taking their children in their arms, went out on to the bank of the Bug and gave themselves up.

A similar scene took place in the cellar where the wives and children of the officers of the 98th Anti-Tank Artillery Battalion were sheltering.

"You must try to save the children," Senior Political Organizer Nesterchuk, commanding the defence on this sector, told the women. "But be prepared for anything—humiliation, mockery, beating and even death. Remember it is your duty to endure everything for the sake of your country and for the sake of your children."

Nesterchuk's fourteen-year-old daughter Lida, who had been with her father since the early days of the siege, burst into tears and begged to be

Senior Political Organizer
Nikolai Nesterchuk

allowed to stay in the fortress. But Nesterchuk would not agree, and Lida heard him say to one of the officers:

"No, she had better go, I could never bring myself to shoot her when the end comes. I've got two cartridges left in my pistol—one for the enemy, the other for myself."

And Lida was surrendered with the other women and children.

The ferocity of the fighting grew more and more intense. In their feverish desire to get rid of the garrison the enemy threw in fresh forces, regardless of losses.

In the last days of June particularly fierce fighting took place in the northern sector of Central Island, near the triple-arch gate, where the main forces of the garrison, under Fomin and Zubachov, were in action. The Germans had succeeded in capturing several barrack rooms adjoining

Partisan Commander Evgeniya Nikolayevna Stasenko

allowed to stay in the hideout. But Evgeniya would not agree, and Lida never thought to ask her to remain.

"No, she [Lida] told me, I could never bring myself to sleep, but when the end comes I've got two cartridges left in my pistol — one for the enemy, the other for myself."

And Lida was surrounded with the other women and children.

The security of the fighting group grew more and more intense. In their fervent desire to get rid of the partisans the enemy threw in fresh forces, supported by heavy

On the last day of June particularly heavy fighting took place in the northern sector at Central Island, near the village of Lyuboml, where the main forces of the partisans, under Fomin and Zyablov, were in action. The Germans had succeeded in capturing several heights, thereby depriving

the gate on the west, but Bitko, who was in charge of the defence at this point, had managed to stop their submachine-gunners making further progress through the circular barracks. Fomin and Zubachov's men foiled all the enemy's attempts to consolidate their positions in the east wing of the barracks. This wing was a blind alley, and once the enemy got a foothold in the first section of the building that adjoined the triple-arch gate they could force the Soviet infantry inside the building back to a blank wall. Everybody realized the danger and the struggle for the buildings round the gate was particularly bitter. Several times a day the German submachine-gunners broke into the buildings, but no sooner were they inside than a shout would go up along the whole line: "Germans!" and, without waiting for orders, the men would rush to clear the rooms in a desperate hand-to-hand struggle. This went on day after day, and soon the rooms were cluttered to window level with the corpses of German and Soviet soldiers. But even on these heaps of corpses the struggle was waged with bayonet, grenade and rifle-butt, and the enemy failed to gain possession of that key position.

Then sapper crews were sent up to the gate. As soon as the submachine-gunners began one of their attacks, the sappers made their way along

the roofs of the east wing. Powerful TNT charges were dropped down the chimneys, and walls and ceilings collapsed on the heads of the defenders. Gradually, yard by yard, the building was reduced to rubble, under which the last defenders of the sector perished.

Here, resisting the furious attacks of enemy submachine-gunners, Fyodor Isayev, regimental clerk of the 84th Regiment, who had carried the regimental banner wrapped round his chest, was buried under a pile of rubble. Exhausted and weakened by their wounds, Political Organizer Pyotr Koshkarov and Red Army men Alexander Fil, Ivan Dorofeyev, Alexander Rebzuyev and others who had fought with Fomin and Zubachov were taken prisoner.

Regimental Commissar Fomin suffered an even more tragic fate. Stunned by an explosion and half buried in debris, he and several of his men were dragged out of the ruins by the Germans. The prisoners were revived and sent under a strong guard to the Kholmsky Gate, where they were brought before a Nazi officer who spoke good Russian. The officer ordered the submachine-gunners to search them.

On Fomin's orders, the men had destroyed all their papers long ago. The commissar himself was dressed in an ordinary soldier's padded jacket and a tunic without any badges of rank.

Emaciated, bearded, his clothes in rags, Fomin looked no different from the other prisoners, and the men hoped to save his life.

But among the prisoners there was a traitor, who had not deserted to the enemy previously apparently only because he had been afraid of getting a bullet in the back from his own side. Now his time had come and he decided to win the Germans' favour. With an ingratiating smile he stepped out of the ranks and addressed the officer:

"This man is not an ordinary soldier, sir," he said, pointing at Fomin. "He is a commissar, an important commissar. He ordered us to fight to the last and not surrender."

The officer issued a brief order and the submachine-gunners jostled Fomin out of the ranks. The smile faded from the face of the traitor when he saw the prisoners' inflamed sunken eyes fixed on him in silent hatred. One of the German soldiers jabbed him with the butt of his rifle and the traitor, his eyes shifting uneasily, fell in again.

The officer gave an order and several submachine-gunners surrounded the commissar and led him through the Kholmsky Gate to the bank of the Mukhavets. A minute later short bursts of submachine-gun fire were heard.

At that time there was another group of Soviet prisoners on the bank of the river not far from the gate. Among them were men of the 84th Regiment, who at once recognized their commissar. They saw the submachine-gunners put Fomin up against the fortress wall, and saw him lift his arm and shout something, but his voice was instantly drowned by shots.

Thus died Regimental Commissar Yefim Fomin, a true son of the Communist Party, one of the chief organizers and leaders of the heroic defence of Brest Fortress.

Half an hour later the other prisoners were marched out of the fortress under guard. It was getting dusk when they were driven into a small brick barn on the bank of the Bug and locked up for the night. But when on the following morning the door was opened and the order to come out was given, the German guards found that one of their prisoners was missing. On a heap of straw in a dark corner of the barn lay the corpse of the man who the day before had betrayed Commissar Fomin. It lay with head thrown back, the eyes bulging horribly, and there were blue finger-marks clearly visible on the neck. He had paid the price for his treachery.

The Germans, however, treated the event with utter indifference. The prisoners were formed up and marched to a camp. Suffering torture from

their wounds, scarcely able to drag one foot after another, the men kept glancing back at the fortress walls, still visible under its pall of smoke. The shots and explosions had not ceased. The fortress was still fighting.

The east section of the barracks was now in the hands of the enemy. But an even more bitter struggle was going on for the White Palace, and the defenders of the club, most of whom were Moscow men, directed a withering fire against the enemy submachine-gunners from the tall windows of the former chapel. The whole western part of Central Island was firmly held by the remaining forces of the 44th and 333rd regiments.

Groups of frontier guards continued fighting on West Island, where firing did not cease until the fourteenth day. In the northern sector of the fortress, the East Fort, though surrounded on all sides, was still holding out. Nesterchuk and Akimochkin's artillerymen, ensconced in the earthworks by the Kobrinsky Gate, had lost all their guns but were fighting back with rifles and submachine-guns. About this time Nikolai Nesterchuk, an ardent Communist, was mortally wounded and died in battle; command of the group was taken over by Lieutenant Akimochkin, his chief of staff. Together with battery commander Lieutenant Kaganovich and platoon com-

mander Lieutenant Chesnokov, Akimochkin buried the battle standard and the battalion's secret papers in one of the chambers of the wall and directed the fire of the artillerymen as they used up their last ammunition repelling constant enemy attacks.

At the end of June there was particularly heavy fighting in the vicinity of the East Fort. By constant and increasing attacks the Germans had succeeded in capturing the north and north-east earthworks of the fortress and in cutting off the company defending the West Fort from Major Gavrilov's main forces. But the remnants of this surrounded company went on fighting and a machine-gun in the blockhouse attached to the fort chattered incessantly amid the noise of battle. Two other companies, which had been thrown back from the earthworks with heavy losses, reformed in the East Fort and under Gavrilov's command so strengthened the defence that the Germans were obliged to resort to extreme measures to break the resistance of this handful of Soviet fighting men.

"It was impossible to approach the fort with infantry," the German staff officers wrote in their reports, for excellent machine-gun and rifle fire from deep trenches and the horseshoe-shaped yard mowed down everyone that came within range. There was only one alternative—to starve

the Russians out. For this purpose it was necessary to resort to every means of hastening their exhaustion: continuous harassing fire from heavy mortars aimed at preventing the Russians from moving about the trenches or the yard, close-range bombardment by tanks, broadcasting of surrender appeals by megaphone or dropping of leaflets."

Further entries in this report, however, make it clear that these measures proved insufficient.

"28.6 shelling of the fort by tanks and siege guns was continued, but apparently without success," says the report. "Shelling by an 88 mm. anti-aircraft gun achieved no result either. The division commander therefore gave instructions to contact Mukhavets air-field with a view to arranging a bombing attack. Air attack turned out to be possible but involved withdrawing our own troops beyond the earthworks as far back as the West Fort. This operation was carried out in the afternoon with careful covering fire to ensure that the Russians did not break out of the East Fort. Unfortunately, low cloud on 28.6 prevented the air attack from taking place. The tight ring round the East Fort was restored. At night captured Russian searchlights (and vehicle headlights) were used to light up the fort. The Russians still answered every careless movement with fire.

"29.6 at 8.00 aircraft dropped a large number of 500-kilogram bombs. No result was evident. Fresh active bombardment of the fort by tanks and siege guns was equally ineffective, despite the fact that some of the walls were seen to collapse in places.

"30.6 in preparation for an offensive bottles and barrels of petrol, oil and grease were rolled forward into the trenches round the fort and ignited with grenades and incendiary bullets."

The German staff officers modestly neglected to mention one fact. Besides these bottles and barrels, tear-gas bombs were thrown into the yard of the fort, and for several hours the whole of the little garrison, including women, children and wounded, were forced to wear respirators. But even amid clouds of smoke and gas the men went on fighting and drove off the enemy attacks with bullets and grenades.

On June 29, the Germans presented the fort with an ultimatum. Either they must surrender within an hour or the garrison would be utterly destroyed. After the ultimatum had been broadcast there was a lull and Major Gavrilov took advantage of it to hold an open Party meeting.

Nearly the whole garrison assembled in a big chamber inside the earthworks, leaving only machine-gunners and observers on the ramparts. One after another the Communists stood up and

swore to fight to the last and die rather than submit to the enemy. It was announced at the meeting that people would be accepted as members of the Party and dozens of non-Communists, officers and men, gave in applications and were admitted to the ranks of the Party. There was no writing paper and the applications were written on scraps of newspaper and even on the German leaflets with which the Nazis had urged the garrison to surrender.

It was clear, however, that the fort could not hold out much longer. On Gavrilov's orders all staff papers were destroyed in order that they should not fall into enemy hands. It was decided to bury the standard of the independent artillery battalion, which was still in the fort.

Senior Lieutenant Shramko had in the first days of the defence entrusted Junior Sergeant Rodion Semenyuk with the care of this banner. Shramko had been killed, but Semenyuk was still alive and wore the banner round his chest under his tunic. Now the moment had come to hide it.

Semenyuk carefully wrapped the banner in tarpaulin, placed the bundle in a canvas bucket which he had found in a nearby stable, then put the bucket in a metal pail. He then dug a pit in one of the chambers of the wall, buried the pail with the banner in it, stamped down the earth and carefully disguised the spot.

Meanwhile the term of the enemy's ultimatum had expired. The German artillery opened fire, aircraft again began circling over the fort and the junior sergeant hurried back to his post in the line. The fight went on.

Only after the fort had been subjected to mass bombing, during which one of the aircraft dropped a bomb weighing 1,800 kilograms that shook the whole of Brest, only when all the fort buildings had been destroyed and the inner yard was a sea of fire, were the German infantry able to storm the earthworks and penetrate the inner chambers. They took the women, children, wounded and a few exhausted survivors of the garrison prisoner. But though they searched every chamber with the utmost thoroughness, they were unable to find Major Gavrilov or his political adviser, who had been an energetic second-in-command of the garrison throughout the siege. The enemy came to the conclusion that they had committed suicide.

THE LAST DEFENDERS OF THE CITADEL

A few days after the death of Commissar Fomin a party of men led by Captain Zubachov once again made a desperate attempt to break out of the Central Fortress to the north. But by this

time the Germans had deepened their line on the northern sector and in a fierce engagement Zubachov's party was defeated, a few of the men and their wounded commander being taken prisoner.

Almost at the same time a party under Lieutenant Bitko ceased to exist. The men could no longer obtain ammunition and their supplies were nearly exhausted. The time came when Bitko had only one cartridge left in his revolver. His friends noticed that the senior lieutenant was trying to get away from them. For him, a galant Kuban Cossack, a steadfast Communist, and a veteran officer, the mere thought of falling into enemy hands alive was hateful. Vasily Bitko had decided to shoot himself with his last cartridge.

But his friends guessed his intention. When during a lull in the fighting Bitko made some excuse to leave the cellar they surrounded him and started persuading him not to commit suicide. They argued that his death would have a depressing effect on the men, and that he should share the same fate that awaited them all. Bitko lowered his head and made no reply, but it was clear that these arguments had influenced him.

While the conversation was in progress, several German submachine-gunners had approached the basement window. Lifting his head Bitko looked out of the window. The leading submachine-gunner was only a few paces away.

"You, fascist..." Bitko shouted. "This was meant for me, but now you'll get it."

And throwing up his gun he shot the German on the spot.

The same day the last survivors of this group, led by Bitko, Senior Lieutenant Semenenko and Junior Lieutenant Sgibnev, rushed the Mukhavets, engaged the enemy in hand-to-hand fighting and tried to force their way to the north-west. In the unequal struggle the group was scattered and all three commanders were taken prisoner. That night, when they were being marched to camp on the other side of the Bug, Bitko and Sgibnev escaped. Two days later, the Germans dragged Sgibnev, wounded and beaten, into the camp and he told his comrades that Vasily Bitko had been killed by an enemy bullet when trying to swim the Western Bug.

At about the same time another fine hero of the defence of Brest Fortress, Andrei Kizhevatov, a frontier guard lieutenant, died the death of the brave.

Senior Lieutenant Potapov and his men continued to hold the Terespolsky Gate area for a few days, beating off attacks by submachine-gunners from West Island. Ammunition stocks were very low, however, and Potapov also decided to make an attempt to break through the enemy ring. But his plan was different from Zubachov's

or Bitko's. Potapov realized that attempts to break through northwards would inevitably meet with disaster. The enemy was expecting attacks in that direction and had concentrated his main forces in the area. The Germans, however, were quite unprepared for an attempted break-through in the west or the south, and had left only small covering forces in those sectors. Potapov decided to take advantage of this. He intended to take his group and force the bridge on to West Island, then swim the side-channel of the Bug and gain the neighbouring South Island, near the hospital, and from there make his way to the Brest South Military Cantonment, where Soviet artillery and tank units had been stationed before the war. Potapov hoped that the tank men would still be fighting in this area.

Senior Lieutenant Vasily Bitko

Major Leonard Darwin
1914

After one of the routine ultimatums, when the defenders of Central Island were given half an hour "for consideration," and the enemy artillery temporarily ceased fire, Potapov and those of his men who were still alive ran across to the barracks adjoining the Terespolsky Tower. At the moment when the ultimatum expired and the Germans began shelling the centre of the fortress with redoubled fury, the command was given. Leaping out of the windows on to the bank of the Bug, the whole group rushed across the bridge and the dam beside it on to West Island. The men ran without firing a single shot and the enemy did not notice the attack immediately. By the time they realized what was happening and their machine-guns opened fire on the bridge and the dam, the greater part of Potapov's men had already taken cover in the bushes of the island and were making their way south-east. In the bushes by the dam, part of the group, which included Petya Klipa and Kolya Novikov, came across a man in the green-topped cap of a frontier guard. He was lying not far from the bank, behind a light machine-gun pointing in the direction of the enemy. On one side of him was a great pile of spent cartridges, on the other a pile of spare ammunition. All around, in the bushes and on the road lay corpses in grey-green uniform—evidence of the machine-gunner's work.

The frontier guard lay motionless, like a dead man, but when Petya Klipa ran up to him, he slowly lifted his head. His face was so terrible that the boy halted in confusion. It was an earthy grey, unbelievably thin and covered with a thick growth of beard. Dark spots showed under the sunken inflamed eyes. Evidently the man had been lying at his gun for many days, without food or sleep, possessed by only one thought—not to let the enemy through.

The men of Potapov's group surrounded him, trying to persuade him to join them in making a break-through. But the machine-gunner only shook his head slowly and in a strangely indifferent voice said: "I'm not going anywhere away from here."

It was said in such a tone that everyone realized it was useless to argue. Without further delay the men ran on through the bushes. A few minutes later they came out on the side-channel of the river dividing West and South islands and plunged into the water.

At that moment German machine-guns hidden in the bushes opened fire. The Bug was churned into foam by bullets, and one after the other the heads of the swimming men vanished below the surface. On the far bank the figures of submachine-gunners with dogs could be seen among the bushes.

The majority of Potapov's men were killed in the river. Only a few of the men managed to gain the opposite bank and most of them fell into enemy hands. Those who had not yet entered the water dashed back to the bridge and the dam in an attempt to reach the fortress, where it would still be possible to continue the struggle.

And the struggle went on, even though the main groups of the defenders of the Central Fortress had ceased to exist as an organized whole. Only the character of the fighting had changed. The defence was no longer unified, there was no longer any constant co-ordination and connection between the various groups of defenders. The defence had fallen apart, as it were, into a large number of centres of resistance, but the resistance itself had become even fiercer and more embittered. Everyone realized that they could not break out of the ring. There was only one thing left for them to do—to hold out at all costs, to fight until help came from the east, or until they had no more strength to lift their guns.

The enemy officers and soldiers were amazed at this persistence of the last defenders of the fortress, as something quite inexplicable and impossible for them to understand. What were they hoping for, what gave them their strength? The people of Brest often heard German officers and

men who had taken part in the final battles ask these questions.

It seemed quite incredible. The dead Soviet soldiers and the few who were captured alive were utterly emaciated. The prisoners were walking skeletons, they swayed on their feet with hunger, and the sight of them moved the women of the villages to tears. They were tormented by a thirst so unbearable that when the guards allowed them to drink they could drink pailfuls. It was difficult to believe that these living corpses could bear weapons, that they could shoot and struggle in hand-to-hand combat. But men in the same desperate condition as they were continuing to fight in the fortress—firing, throwing grenades, bayoneting, stunning with their rifle butts the burly storm-troopers of the German 45th Division. Where did they find the strength? None of the enemy could understand it.

But their strength was nearly gone. The Soviet soldiers could scarcely hold their guns, could scarcely move from exhaustion. And only a furious, burning hatred of the enemy supported them in a struggle that had now exceeded the limits of human endurance. The many long and terrible days which they had endured in the boiling cauldron of Brest Fortress had been a school of hatred for them. Before their eyes defenceless women and little children had been blown to pieces

by bombs and shells, their friends had died in battle at their side. That was something they could never forget, just as they could never forget that night of June 22, when the surprise attack of Hitler's hordes had smashed and trampled on their lives. So much bitter irrestrainable hatred of these murderers in grey-green uniform had piled up in the hearts of the Soviet fighting men that the desire to avenge had become stronger than hunger and thirst. This, their sharpest feeling was a combination of everything—the soldier's sense of duty, the pride of the free man who can be killed but never enslaved, and the consciousness of taking part in the immense country-wide struggle in which, further east, the whole country was taking part. Though they knew none of the details of this struggle, every man felt in his heart that it was a matter of life and death.

Day after day the German artillery and submachine-gunners worked methodically extinguishing the last fires of resistance in the fortress. But to their amazement these fires flared up again. From the basements of barracks and other buildings in the fortress, from chambers deep in the earthworks, bursts of machine-gun fire, the rifle shots would suddenly break the silence, and the burial ground of the 45th Nazi Division continued to spread. Chambers and cellars were

carefully searched, the buildings where Soviet troops were resisting were blown up room by room, but after a while the firing would be renewed among the ruins. Certain groups of defenders made their way into sectors where the Germans had for long considered themselves masters of the situation, and their bullets caught the fascists in the most unexpected places. The defenders of the fortress went down into the deep cellars and by means of underground passages unknown to the Germans left enemy-occupied sectors and reappeared elsewhere.

On July 8, the commanders of the 45th Division sent back to headquarters a report that the fortress had been captured, evidently considering that the remaining centres of resistance would be crushed in a few hours. But on the following day the number of these centres increased and it became clear that the struggle would be prolonged.

Groups of defenders in the western section of the barracks, in the 333rd Regiment's cellars and all that part of Central Island, remained out of the enemy's control. Machine-gun bursts and rifle shots from frontier guards were still to be heard on West Island. The blockhouse attached to the West Fort was still firing in the northern sector, and the last of the artillerymen commanded by Akimochkin were fighting desperately at

the East Gate. A handful of riflemen commanded by Political Organizer Venediktov was holding one of the chambers of the northern earthworks. Even the East Fort, where after so terrible an assault it did not seem possible that any living creature could have survived, suddenly came to life again and light machine-guns opened up from its earthworks. This was Major Gavrilov and a handful of his men who had survived the German attack.

Gavrilov had not been taken prisoner and had not shot himself. He was trapped by the German submachine-gunners in a dark chamber in the earthworks of the fort, which had been his command post for the past few days. With the major was a frontier guard, who throughout the siege had acted as his adjutant. Cut off from the rest of the garrison, they ran from one chamber to the next, throwing hand grenades and firing back at the Germans with their last cartridges. But soon it became clear that the garrison's resistance was broken and the Germans had control of practically the whole fort. Gavrilov and his adjutant had very little ammunition left and so they decided to try to hide until the Germans left the fort and it would be possible to make their way north-east out of the fortress towards the forests of Belovezhskaya Pushcha, where they hoped Soviet partisans were already in action.

Luckily they managed to find a safe hiding place. During the early days of the defence the major had ordered his men to dig a tunnel in the earthworks. A hole was made in the brick wall of one of the chambers and some of the men began taking turns at digging the tunnel. The earthworks turned out to be made of sand, however, and the work had to be abandoned as the tunnel roof kept falling in. But the hole in the wall remained and behind it there was a kind of deep burrow in the thickness of the earthworks. It was this burrow that Gavrilov and his adjutant chose as a hiding place just as the voices of the Germans searching the neighbouring chambers reached their ears.

Having crawled into the narrow passage left by the defenders, the major and his adjutant began digging to the right and left. The loose sand yielded easily and they gradually began to move away from the hole in the wall; Gavrilov burrowed to the left, his adjutant to the right. They worked with feverish haste, like moles, blocking the tunnel behind them. Nearly half an hour passed before the enemy soldiers entered the chamber, by which time the major and his adjutant had each managed to burrow about three yards away from the entrance hole along the inside of the wall.

Major Pyotr Gavrilov, 1941

Through the wall Gavrilov could clearly hear the Germans talking to one another as they searched the chamber. He held his breath, knowing that a single movement might give him away. The Germans had apparently noticed the hole, for they stood round it for several minutes discussing something. Then one of them fired a burst into the hole with his submachine-gun. The Germans were quiet for a moment, listening, and when they were satisfied that there was no one there, went on to examine the other chambers.

Gavrilov spent several days in his burrow, in utter darkness. He did not even know whether it was day or night outside. Hunger and thirst were a growing torment. He had two rusks in his pocket but, though he only nibbled at them, they did not last long. He found a way of alleviating his

Major Fryt, Gordon Hill.

Through the kind favour [illegible] the following has been taken from the records of this battalion. He left his home, knowing that a single exception might give him away. He [illegible] but by [illegible] reason he [illegible] for [illegible] and spent several months [illegible] with [illegible] then one of them fired a burst into the [illegible] with his sub-machine-gun. The Germans were quiet for a moment, listening, and when they were satisfied that there was no one there, went on to continue their after-examination.

[illegible] spent seven days in his burrow, in utter darkness. He did not even know whether it was day or night outside. Hunger and thirst were a gnawing torment. He had [illegible] in his pocket, but, though he was nibbling at them, they did not last long. He found a way of alleviating his

thirst a little by putting his tongue to the brick wall of the chamber. The bricks were cold and there seemed to be drops of moisture on them. Sleep helped him to forget his hunger and thirst, but he slept only in snatches, afraid of giving himself away by a careless movement or a groan. The enemy was still in the fort, their voices could still be heard, and once or twice German soldiers entered the chamber.

Gavrilov didn't know whether his comrade was alive behind the barrier of sand that separated them. He was afraid to call him, even in a whisper, for the Germans might be near. One false move would ruin everything. Only one thing mattered, he must force himself to wait until the Germans had gone. It was the only chance of escaping and continuing the struggle. In spite of his hunger and thirst, he never forgot about fighting and more than once he ran his fingers carefully over the loaded pistol and the few grenades that remained in his pockets.

German voices were heard less and less often and at length everything seemed to grow quiet. Gavrilov had decided it was time to move out when a machine-gun started firing on the top of the earthworks, just above his head. By the sound he could tell at once that it was a Russian light machine-gun.

Who was using it—his own men or the Ger-

mans? For some hours he lay in an agony of doubt. From time to time the gun fired a short burst. The gunner seemed to be trying to save ammunition and this gave Gavrilov a vague feeling of hope.

At last he made up his mind and called to his adjutant in a whisper. He received an answer. They crawled out into the dark chamber and the first thing they did was to drink their fill from a well that had been dug there. Then with their grenades at the ready they peeped out into the narrow yard of the fort. It was night. Quiet voices could be heard from above. They were speaking Russian.

There turned out to be twelve Soviet soldiers with three light machine-guns on the earthworks. Like Gavrilov, they had managed to hide when the fort was taken. After the German submachine-gunners had left, they had emerged from their hiding place and once again taken up defence positions. During the day they hid in the chamber and at night fired on any enemy soldiers who happened to come near the fort. The Germans thought there was no one in the fort and had not yet discovered that it was from the fort that the machine-gun bursts were coming, particularly as there was intermittent firing going on everywhere. The machine-gun in the West Fort's blockhouse was still active, shots could be heard from

the officers' quarters, and a crackle of firing, now faint, now stronger, mingled with the crash of bursting shells, came from Central Island.

Gavrilov decided to try and lead the whole group out into Belovezhskaya Pushcha.

By day they left only an observer on the wall, but at night they all went up there, and even opened fire, if the chance presented itself. This continued for several days. The fighting did not cease, groups of German soldiers frequently appeared and it was still impossible to leave the fortress. The most terrible part of it was that the defenders of the fort had nothing to eat. The men's meagre supplies of rusks had run out and hunger was making itself felt more and more. The men's last strength was waning. Gavrilov had begun to think of making a desperate attempt to break through when unexpected events upset all his plans.

Unnoticed by the observer, a group of German submachine-gunners arrived at the fort during the daytime. The Germans immediately discovered the Soviet soldiers. Gavrilov was dozing in a corner of the chamber when shouts came from the yard outside: "Russ, surrender!" followed by grenade explosions.

The Germans were few in number and most of them were soon killed, but some escaped. An hour later the fort was surrounded.

The first attacks were repulsed. But the Germans brought up mortars and field guns and soon there were killed and wounded among the little group of defenders. Then came an attack from all sides and the enemy won by sheer weight of numbers. The submachine-gunners gained the top of the wall and the yard below was at the mercy of their grenades.

Once again the burrow in the wall was their hiding place. But this time there were three of them—Gavrilov, his adjutant and another soldier.

Fortunately, night had fallen by this time and the Germans did not risk searching the chambers in the darkness. But Gavrilov realized that as soon as morning came they would search every inch of the fort and might easily discover his hiding place. Something must be done immediately.

After a whispered consultation they crawled cautiously out into the chamber. It was deserted. The yard of the fort was also deserted. But when they crawled to the fort gate they saw campfires with soldiers sitting round them only a short distance away. The enemy had surrounded the fort to make sure that none of its defenders escaped, and was waiting for the dawn.

Escape could only be achieved by fighting. They decided that on Gavrilov's word of command each

of them would throw a grenade at the Germans sitting round the campfire, then all three would scatter in different directions: the adjutant to the south, towards the officers' quarters, the soldier to the east, towards the outer wall, and Gavrilov to the west, towards the road leading from the North Gate to Central Island. Gavrilov's direction was the most dangerous, for German troops frequently moved along the road.

They shook hands and agreed that anyone of them lucky enough to remain alive should make his way to their cherished goal, Belovezhskaya Pushcha. Then Gavrilov whispered the order "Fire!" and they threw their grenades.

Gavrilov could not remember how he got through the line of German outposts. His mind registered only the crash of the exploding grenades, the cries of the German soldiers, the whistle of bullets over his head, and the deep enveloping darkness of the night, even darker now after the bright light of the fires. He ran for all he was worth, gripping his pistol and the second grenade. Behind him he could hear shouts and the sound of running feet. His brain cleared for a moment when he ran across the road, which just then happened fortunately to be deserted. He stopped for a second to recover his breath and at that moment a burst of machine-gun bullets whistled over his head.

It was an unknown Soviet machine-gunner firing from the blockhouse by the West Fort. Alerted by the shouts and firing, he had opened up with long bursts, aiming apparently at the light of the fires. Gavrilov had to throw himself flat by the wall of a ruined building to avoid being hit. But without knowing it, the machine-gunner had saved him. The Germans who had been pursuing the major came under fire and Gavrilov heard them shout to each other and turn back.

About fifteen minutes passed and all was quiet again. Pressing his body to the earth, Gavrilov crawled in the direction of the outer wall, gradually getting further and further away from the road.

The night was impenetrably dark and he did not see the wall until he came right up to it. It was the brick wall of one of the chambers in the earthworks. He groped for the door and went inside.

For a whole hour he groped his way round the dripping slimy walls of the chamber. Then he realized at last where he was. Before the war this had been a stable for the regiment's artillery horses. Now he knew that he was in the north-west sector of the fortress, and he was glad because it was nearer to Belovezhskaya Pushcha.

He went outside and climbed cautiously over the earthworks on to the bank of the moat. The

sky was growing light in the east and dawn was breaking. Before doing anything else, he lay flat on the bank and for a long time drank from the stagnant waters. Then he started wading across to the other bank.

Suddenly he heard German voices in the darkness and stopped dead, staring ahead of him.

Gradually he began to make out the dark outlines of tents on the opposite bank, then a match flared and the red glow of a cigarette appeared. An enemy unit was camped on the far bank.

He stepped silently out of the water and crawled back to the earthworks. Here he discovered a low door and, on entering it, found himself in a narrow corner chamber, with two firing slits facing in different directions. A passage ran from the chamber into the depths of the earthworks. He followed the passage and once again found himself in the stable.

It had grown distinctly lighter. He had to find a safe hiding place for the day. After a little thought he chose the corner chamber. Its walls were thick and the two firing slits might come in useful. If the Germans discovered him, he would have a good view for defence.

He examined the chamber again and found one thing about it that worried him. It offered no hiding place. The Germans had only to glance

through the doorway and they would see him at once.

Then he remembered that near the door of the chamber, on the bank of the canal there were piles of dung that had been dumped there when the stables were cleaned. He hastily began carrying armfuls of this dung and throwing it down in a corner of the chamber. Before morning came his hiding place was ready. He burrowed into the heap of dung and covered himself up, leaving a narrow slit for observation and keeping his five remaining grenades and the two loaded pistols (one Soviet, the other German) ready to hand.

The whole of the next day he lay in the chamber. Enemy soldiers walked about quite close by, doing something on the bank of the canal and talking to one another; once a group of them walked through the chamber to the stable. Gavrilov gripped his pistol in readiness, but they paid no attention to the heap of dung in the corner.

At night he again went down to the bank of the moat and drank. On the far bank he could still see the dark shapes of German tents and hear the voices of the soldiers. But he decided to wait until they went away, particularly as the firing in the fortress seemed to be abating—a sign that the enemy was crushing the last centres of resistance.

He spent three days without food. Then his hunger became so acute that he could bear it no

longer. It occurred to him that near the stable there ought to be some sort of fodder store, where perhaps he would find barley or oats.

He groped about the stable for a long time until his hand touched several lumps of some hard substance in one corner. He bit a piece off one of the lumps and found that it was eatable.

It was fodder cake for horses, a mixture of grain, chaff, straw and some other ingredients. At any rate it assuaged his hunger and even tasted rather nice. Now he had a supply of food and was prepared to wait any length of time until the road to Belovezhskaya Pushcha was clear.

For about five days everything was all right. He ate the fodder cake and at night drank water from the moat. But on the sixth day he began to feel severe pains in the stomach, which increased hourly, causing him unbearable suffering. All that day and the whole of the following night he had to bite his lips to stifle the groans that might have given him away; then he fell into a strange trance and lost count of time. When he came to himself, he felt a terrible weakness, but though scarcely able to lift a finger, felt mechanically for his pistols and grenades.

He must have given himself away by groaning. Suddenly he was awakened by the sound of voices close at hand. Through the spy-hole he saw two submachine-gunners standing over the heap

of dung where he lay. And strange to say, as soon as Gavrilov saw the enemy, his strength returned and he forgot his illness. He felt for the German pistol and flicked up the safety catch.

Apparently the Germans heard his movement, for they started kicking the dung aside. Then he lifted the pistol and with difficulty pressed the trigger. It was an automatic pistol and before he knew it he had emptied the whole magazine. There was a scream and a clatter of boots as the Germans rushed to the door.

He mustered all his strength and stood up, shaking himself free of the dung.

He knew this was his last fight and he steeled himself to meet death as befits a soldier and a Communist—to meet it fighting. He arranged his five grenades beside him and took a firm grip on his Soviet pistol.

The Germans did not keep him waiting long. In about five minutes machine-guns started firing at the window slits. But the slits were so placed that he was safe from anything but a ricochet.

Then he heard the Germans shouting to him to surrender. He guessed they would be creeping cautiously along the wall towards the door and he waited until a shout sounded quite close by. Then he threw two grenades, to left and right, through the window slits. The Germans scattered

and he heard groans that told him the grenades had not been wasted.

Half an hour later the attack was renewed and again he waited and threw his grenades. The Germans retreated, but now he had only one grenade and his pistol.

The enemy changed his tactics. While Gavrilov was watching the window slits, there was a burst of submachine-gun fire and a German appeared in the doorway. Gavrilov threw his last grenade at him. Another German thrust the barrel of his submachine-gun through one of the slits, but Gavrilov fired twice and the barrel disappeared. At that moment something flew in through the other slit and hit the floor. There was a great flash of flame and Gavrilov lost consciousness.

In the military cantonment south of Brest the Germans had organized a large camp for the Soviet prisoners of war who were being brought in from all sectors of the front. It was a camp where hundreds of people died daily from hunger and disease, yet it did have a hospital, staffed by Soviet army doctors who had been captured during the first days of the war. Certain of these doctors who survived imprisonment and are now living in various towns of the Soviet Union relate that on July 23, 1941, on the thirty-second day of war, a Soviet officer who had just been taken prisoner was brought in to the hospital. The man was in a

terrible condition, wounded in several places, bearded, and covered with dust and filth; he was so weak that he could not swallow food and had to be fed artificially in order to save his life. But the German soldiers who brought him to the hospital said that when they had discovered him in one of the chambers of the fortress and tried to take him prisoner, this man, who even then was scarcely alive, had found strength to fight back against heavy odds for a whole hour, killing several German soldiers with his pistol and grenades.

That officer was Major Pyotr Gavrilov.

The enemy had been so impressed by his feat that they had let him live. For three days afterwards German officers visited the camp hospital just to look at the Soviet major who had displayed such unexampled courage and moral strength.

But Major Gavrilov was not the last defender of the fortress. It is said that even in August shots and grenade explosions could be heard coming from the cellars and basements, and that many of the invaders met their death among the ruins of the citadel. Groups of Soviet officers and men went into hiding in the deep cellars and were so dangerous to the enemy that the fascists were afraid to go about alone in the fortress they had captured. In the end, so German officers told citizens of Brest, the German command gave orders that the fortress cellars should be

flooded with the waters of the Bug. Thus died undefeated the last defenders of the Fortress of Brest, anonymous and immortal heroes of its glorious defence.

And yet amazing stories are still told by the people of Brest and the surrounding villages of how several months after the Germans had taken complete possession of the fortress individual Soviet officers and men still hid among the ruins and at night shots were sometimes heard. Some of the local population recall that during the winter of 1941-42, when the occupying forces drove people to the fortress to clear the rubble, they sometimes saw ragged figures in Red Army uniform dart away among the ruins. And more than once an unknown hand wrote on the half-demolished walls the menacing words:

"Death to the German Invaders!"

An even more amazing story is told by one of the defenders of the fortress, Alexander Durasov, once a sergeant-major in the 84th Regiment, who now lives in the town of Moghilev, Byelorussia.

Wounded in the fighting for the fortress, Sergeant-Major Durasov was taken prisoner and spent several months in the prisoner-of-war camp near Brest. In the spring of 1942, when his wound healed, he was sent to Brest and put in a labour gang serving a German hospital.

A party of Jews from the ghetto that the Nazis had set up in the town also worked with the prisoners. Unlike the prisoners, the Jews were not guarded, though they suffered no less humiliation from the invaders and their hangers-on. In the party from the ghetto there was a violinist, who before the war had played in the city restaurant's jazz band and is still remembered by many people in the town.

One day (according to Durasov it was in April, 1942) the violinist was late for work, and when he eventually appeared, excitedly told his comrades what had happened to him.

He had been on his way to the hospital, when he was suddenly overtaken by a German army car with an officer inside. The car braked sharply in front of him and the officer called the violinist over.

"Get in!" he commanded, opening the door.

The violinist got in and the car drove to the fortress. They drove to Central Island and, judging from what the violinist told Durasov, stopped somewhere near where the positions of the 333rd Regiment had been.

Among the ruins a deep hole had been tunnelled. Round it stood a party of German submachine-gunners with their weapons at the ready.

"You must go down!" the officer ordered the violinist. "There's a Russian still hiding in those

cellars. He won't surrender and he shoots. You must persuade him to come out and give himself up. We promise him his life. If you don't succeed, you needn't come back because I'll shoot you."

The violinist climbed down into the hole with difficulty and found himself in a dark underground passage. He groped his way along it all the time calling out who he was and why he had come, so that the unknown Soviet soldier would not shoot him.

Suddenly a shot rang out and the terrified violinist flung himself flat on the damp floor of the passage. Luckily the bullet missed him. Then he heard a faint voice from somewhere ahead.

"Come here, don't be scared," it was saying. "I only fired in the air. It was my last cartridge. I was going to come out anyway, my food supply ran out long ago. Come and give me a hand."

The violinist picked himself up and went forward. Soon he came across a man sitting by the wall. The man put his arms round the violinist and dragged himself to his feet. They made their way to the entrance with the man leaning heavily on the violinist's shoulder.

When they had scrambled out of the hole, the unknown soldier closed his eyes and dropped down on the stones, utterly exhausted. The Germans stood round him in a half-circle, regarding him with silent curiosity. The man was un-

believably thin and emaciated, with a heavy beard covering his face that made it impossible to tell his age. It was also impossible to tell whether he was an officer or not, for his uniform was in rags.

Unwilling to show his weakness, the unknown soldier made an attempt to stand up, but it was no use. The officer gave an order and one of the soldiers put a tin of meat and biscuits down in front of him, but he made no attempt to touch the food. Then the officer asked him if there were any Russians in the cellar.

"No," the unknown soldier replied. "I was alone, and all I came out for was to see how helpless you are here, in Russia. I have fired my last cartridge into the air, but you won't dare to shoot me."

The officer ordered one of the soldiers to take the violinist out of the fortress, and what happened to the prisoner after that has remained unknown.

Who was that last hero who spent ten months in the cellars of Brest Fortress, how did he live and fight and what happened to him afterwards? Perhaps it will always remain a mystery. But that mystery bears the same stamp of magnificent and tragic heroism as the whole amazing story of the defence of Brest Fortress, which only now is revealing to us its inspiring secrets.

THE MEMORY OF THE PEOPLE

History is the memory of the people. But to be able to remember one must know, and what happened during the first months of the war in Brest Fortress for long remained unknown to the people or was handed down in story as an only half-believed legend.

In the summer of 1941, when the Soviet Army was being pressed back along the whole front towards Moscow, occasional vague rumours were heard that deep in the German rear, right on the frontier near Brest, certain Soviet units, locked in a ring of enemy divisions, had for many days been fighting a stubborn and heroic battle on the first yards of Soviet soil. These rumours were brought by the groups that had fought their way out of encirclement and crossed the front-line; they were confirmed by the crews of Soviet night bombers, who, flying over Brest on their way to bomb targets in the enemy's rear, noticed the undying glare of fires a little distance from the town, the flash of explosions and the glittering lines of tracer bullets piercing the darkness.

But what troops were fighting back there, on the Bug, how many of them there were and how they were faring in their unequal struggle, all this remained unknown because there was no ra-

dio link with the fortress. The terrible flood of events during the first months of the war submerged the rumours of the heroic defence of Brest Fortress, turning them into a fleeting legend that was soon driven from people's memories by fresh battles and fresh trials.

Nine months passed and on one sector of the front in the region of Orsha, Soviet officers examining the captured staff papers of the 45th German Division, which had just been routed, discovered a "Battle Report on the Capture of Brest-Litovsk." The report gave a day-to-day account of the fighting in Brest Fortress in the last days of June, 1941. It appeared from the report that the Soviet garrison had held out for nine days and that all resistance was finally crushed by July 1. Reading between the lines of that dry official document it was easy to feel the enemy's respectful surprise at meeting such heroic firmness and determination on the first yards of Soviet territory, a firmness they had not encountered in any of their victorious campaigns in Western Europe. The final paragraph of the report contains a significant acknowledgement: "Overwhelming attacks on a fortress defended by a courageous garrison cost a lot of blood. This simple truth has been proved yet again in the capture of Brest-Litovsk.... The Russians in Brest-Litovsk fought with exceptional stubbornness and determination,

they displayed superb infantry training and a splendid will to resist."

The "Battle Report on the Capture of Brest-Litovsk" was translated into Russian and on June 21, 1942, the newspaper *Red Star* printed an article entitled "A Year Ago in Brest," containing excerpts from the captured German document.

Thus, in effect, it was the Germans themselves who told the Soviet people the first details of the heroic defence of Brest Fortress. The vague legend had become reality, as yet perhaps not fully clarified, but already dear and stimulating to the heart of the nation.

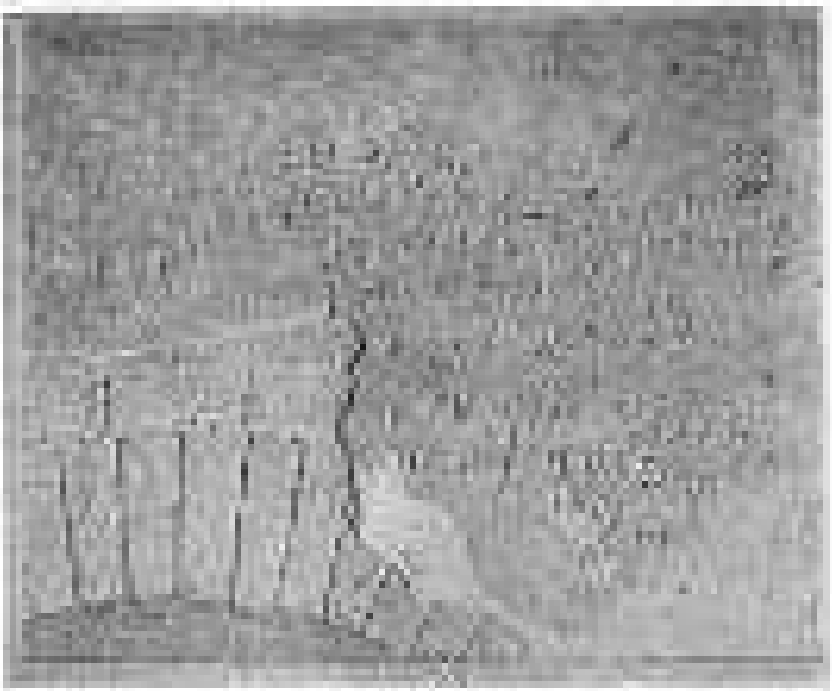
Another two years passed. On July 28, 1944, in the course of the great offensive started by several Soviet fronts in Byelorussia Soviet units liberated Brest and entered the fortress.

The fortress had been practically razed to the ground and the mere sight of the ruins indicated the violence and ferocity of the fighting that had taken place there. The ruins of the fortress wore an air of majestic sternness, as though the unbroken spirit of its fallen defenders still lived among them. The grim heaps of stone, half overgrown with grass and bushes, scarred and gashed by bullets and shrapnel, seemed to have soaked up the fire and blood of past battles, and those who now roamed among these ruins naturally began to think how much these stones had seen, and

Inscription on the wall of the garrison club

how much they could tell, if only a miracle would happen and they could speak.

And the miracle happened. Suddenly the stones began to speak. On parts of the walls that were still standing, on door and window frames, on cellar vaults, on the buttresses of bridges, people began to discover insciptions left by members of the garrison. In these inscriptions, some signed, some anonymous, some hastily scribbled in pencil, others simply scratched with a bayonet or bullet, the defenders stated their determination



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to fight to the death, sent last greetings to their country and friends, spoke of their devotion to the people and the Communist Party. It was as if the living voices of the heroes of 1941 were speaking, and the soldiers of 1944 listened with pain and deep-felt emotion to these voices that rang with the pride of duty fulfilled, the grief of parting with life, a calm courage in the face of death, and the call for revenge.

"There were five of us: Sedov, I. Grutov, Bogolyub, Mikhailov, V. Selivanov. We fought the first attack on 22.VI.1941. We shall die but not retreat!" reads an inscription on the bricks of the outer wall near the Terespolsky Gate.

"1941 June 26. There were three of us. We've had a hard time. But we've not lost courage and we'll die like heroes!" was scratched on the wall of one of the rooms in the west section of the barracks.

In the choir gallery of the chapel, where the cinema operator's box used to be when it became a club, an inscription was found that was later removed from the wall and is now kept in a museum: "There were three of us from Moscow: Ivanov, Stepanchikov, Zhuntyaev, who defended this chapel, and we made a vow never to surrender it. July 1941." And under this inscription there was another: "I'm the only one left. Zhuntyaev and Stepanchikov are dead. The Germans

are in the chapel. One grenade left, but no surrender. Avenge us, comrades. 1941."

It was not only the stones that spoke. In Brest and the surrounding country there were people who had taken part in or witnessed the events of June-July, 1941, including the wives and children of the fallen officers, who during the siege had been in the fortress with their husbands and fathers, and who had afterwards endured all the horrors of the occupation in German prison camps. They were able to give the names of many of the defenders and remembered various episodes and details concerning the battle for the fortress.

It was then that a strange contradiction was noticed. In the German staff document, captured in 1942 at the headquarters of the 45th Infantry Division, it was stated that the fortress fell on June 30, 1941. And yet people who had been in the fortress itself, and others who had seen the battle from afar, all stated positively that the fighting had gone on longer and had ended only in the last days of July or even in the beginning of August. Some of the women had been taken prisoner only on July 14-15, and they remembered quite clearly that when they were marched away under guard, fighting was going on in several places as bitterly as ever. The townspeople of Brest affirmed that the thunder of German guns

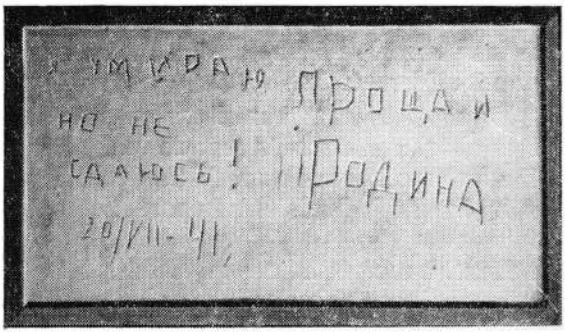
and the rattle of machine-gun fire was still heard in the last ten days of July, and wounded soldiers and officers were still being brought from the fortress to the German military hospital in the town. In short, eye-witness reports make it clear that the fortress held out not for a week, as was stated in the 45th Division's report, but over a month.

No direct, concrete evidence to bear this out, however, could be found. The dates under the inscriptions made by the defenders on the fortress walls were no more specific than "June" or "July 1941," and some of the inscriptions were not dated at all. And it was only in 1952 that on the wall of one of the inner chambers in what was left of the south-west section of the barracks a Moscow museum worker discovered a few barely decipherable letters. An unknown soldier, who had left no signature, had scratched six Russian words crookedly on the plaster:

"I am dying but won't surrender. Good-bye my country!"

Below them was the date: 20/VII/41.

The piece of plaster bearing this signature was carefully removed from the wall and taken to Moscow, where it was subsequently exhibited in one of the halls of the Museum of the Soviet Army. Now there was irrefutable proof that the earlier date for the fall of Brest Fortress, June 30,

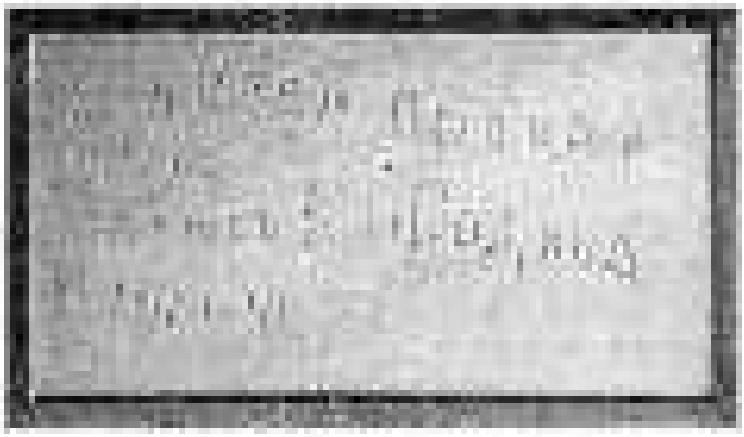


Inscription on the wall of the barracks

1941, given in the German document, was false.

Gradually more and more details of the defence came to light. After the war some of the buildings of the fortress were restored and the rubble was sorted for bricks that could be used in building. In the course of the work the remains of the defenders, their clothing and papers, were found under the debris. The people of Brest buried these heroes with military honours in the town cemetery, and their weapons and other objects discovered among the ruins were put on exhibition in various museums all over the country.

In 1949, when the ruins of the Terespolsky Gate were being cleared, the remains of Lieutenant Alexei Naganov of the 333rd Regiment, who had been killed in the early days of the defence, were



Inscription on the wall in the tunnel

1241, given in the Roman Calendar, was John

Goldcliff priory and other details of the distress came to light. After the year 1400 of the buildings of the priory were removed and the rubble was stored for bricks that could be used in building. In the course of the work the remains of the defenders, their shields and swords were found under the rubble. The people of Brent called these bones 'men's bones' and carefully buried them in the churchyard. In the lower corridor, and their weapons and other objects discovered among the ruins were put in cases. Here is a fine specimen of all over the country.

In 1242, when the name of the Tewkesbury Gate was being changed, the property of Lieutenant Alfred Hayward of the 111th Regiment, who had been killed in the early days of the fighting, was

found under the rubble. The Y.C.L. membership card in his pocket established his identity and beside the dead lieutenant lay his pistol, cocked for action.

Lieutenant Alexei Naganov

Letters and papers belonging to other members of the garrison, a banner, and finally the fragments of Order No. 1, which made it possible to establish the names of the men who commanded the heroic struggle for the fortress, were found in the same way. The broken, rusty rifles, pistols and submachine-guns of Soviet soldiers were recovered from under the stones and it was found that if there were any cartridges in the magazines, the weapons were usually cocked, showing that their owners had died fighting.

And in the end not only the weapons of those who had fought were found, but the men themselves. Some of the defenders turned out to be

Lieutenant Adam
Grigoriev

[illegible] under the rubble. The [illegible] said in his report, established his identity and handed the card [illegible] by the guard, sealed for secrecy.

Letters and papers belonging to other members of the garrison; a [illegible] and finally the [illegible] of Order No. 1, which made it possible to establish the identity of the man who [illegible] the brave struggle for the Volynka were found in the same way. The broken, rusty rifles, pistols and submachine-guns of Soviet soldiers were removed from under the stones and it was found that in these rare cases when cartridges in the magazines, the weapons were carefully cocked, showing that the owners had died fighting.

And in the end not only the memories of those who had fought were found, but the significant relics. Some of the detectives turned out to be

still alive. There were very few of them; some had experienced all the horrors of German concentration camps, others had managed to escape, and had fought in partisan detachments and later had rejoined the army.

THEY LIVE AMONG US

On the outskirts of Krasnodar, in one of the new streets of this rapidly growing town, in a row of houses built by retired officers stands a little white cottage surrounded by thick, carefully tended grapevine. On early spring mornings, on hot summer days, in the gloom of autumn, an elderly man in an army tunic and top boots spends long hours among the green foliage, tying up and pruning the vines. He has a broad face with high cheek-bones and a stubborn determined look in his dark eyes.

This man is Major Pyotr Gavrilov, now retired and living on his pension, one of the heroes of Brest Fortress, the commander of the East Fort, who on the thirty-second day of the war, trapped by the Germans in one of the fortress chambers, fought an unequal battle and, though scarcely alive, astonished the enemy with his courage and fighting spirit.

Four long and bitter years he spent in one of Hitler's prison camps. A Communist since 1922,

and a participant in the Civil War, he conducted himself in captivity as befits a Bolshevik and a Soviet officer, upholding his honour as a citizen of his Socialist Motherland in the face of all difficulties.

Returning to his country after the liberation, he was restored to the rank of major and soon afterwards appointed commandant of a Soviet camp for Japanese prisoners of war in Siberia. With the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps fresh in his mind, Gavrilov made his camp a model institution, with proper conditions for the prisoners. He prevented an epidemic of typhus among the Japanese and put a stop to the injustices committed by Japanese officers in distributing supplies among their men. Gavrilov has many messages of gratitude from his commanding officers to show for his genuinely humane and genuinely Soviet work during those years.

Then he retired, was granted a pension and went away with his wife to live in Krasnodar, where he had once lived for many years while in command of various army units. Now P. Gavrilov is a member of the Soviet War Veterans Committee, an active public man, who has often spoken at army units, factories, and schools in Krasnodar on what he saw and experienced in Brest Fortress.

Other men who took part in that heroic defence

also live in Krasnodar. Gavrilov's wartime friends often join him over a bottle of home-made wine in his little house. Sergeant Anatoly Korzh, now an engineer, rankers Anatoly Bessonov, a turner, Pyotr Telenga, a secondary school teacher, and Vladimir Puzakov, who is now on the staff of the Gelendzhik Holiday Home. Together they recall those memorable days of desperate fighting, their friends who were killed—Captain Ivan Zubachov, who was tortured to death in a Nazi prison camp, Vasily Bitko from their native Kuban, whose family they sometimes visit at the Abinskaya regional centre, and many others. Nothing could be stronger than their fighting friendship, welded by the mortal fire of patriotic struggle in the walls of the Russian fortress.

And on the other side of the Caucasus, in the extreme south, right on the Turkish frontier, among the grim mountains of Armenia, a geological expedition scours the rocky earth for precious metals. It is led by a stocky forty-year-old engineer with quick merry eyes and energetic gestures.

The engineer's name is Samvel Matevosyan. He is Matevosyan, the Y.C.L. secretary, who during the first days of the defence became one of Regimental Commissar Fomin's closest assistants and led his Young Communist Leaguers in a daring bayonet charge that destroyed the first detach-

ment of German submachine-gunners that broke through into the Central Fortress.

Twice wounded on that first day, Matevosyan dressed his own wounds and continued to command his men. On the morning of the third day a serious wound put him completely out of action and he was sent down into the cellar of the White Palace, where many days later in a state of delirium he was taken prisoner.

He was sent to the prison camp in the South Military Cantonment. No sooner did his wound heal than Matevosyan began planning an escape. In the autumn of 1941, six officers and men led by Matevosyan wormed their way under the barbed wire at night and made off into the surrounding forests.

Matevosyan then fought in a partisan detachment operating in the Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia, was again seriously wounded, escaped from the German-appointed police force, and then became one of the organizers of the anti-fascist underground movement in the town of Lutsk. When Soviet troops advanced on the town Matevosyan and his comrades organized an uprising and hastened the capture of the town by the Soviet army.

After being sent on an officers' training course, he returned to the front as a Guards' lieutenant and commander of a Guards' assault company.

In command of this company he took part in the great campaign that ended with the storming of Berlin, and was one of those who signed their names on the walls of the Reichstag. Samvel Matevosyan's career as an officer in the Great Patriotic War is marked by seven battle wounds and two military orders.

Bugler Petya Klipa, the youngest hero of Brest Fortress, also came through alive. With seven other men he got out of the fortress in the breakthrough attempted by Potapov's group. But on the following day he was captured by the Germans on the other side of the Bug and found himself in a camp on Polish territory.

There he met several other boy soldiers like himself, from other regiments. And although they were all older than he, his irrepressible initiative and daring quickly made him their acknowledged leader. He actively set about preparing an escape, and before long five of the boys managed to slip out of the camp, made their way to one of the villages near Brest and got themselves work with the local peasants.

But Petya had other dreams. He tried to persuade his friends to go east, in the wake of the Soviet forces, so that they could cross the frontline and rejoin the army. He wanted to get to grips with the enemy again.

In the end one of the boys, Volodya Kazmin, agreed to Petya's suggestion and the two friends set out on their long trek through the forests and marshes of Byelorussia. They walked several hundred miles before they were caught by a German-appointed village policeman. The boys were then sent to work in Germany.

Petya Klipa had a very hard time, but it is all over now. Now he is a qualified turner at the Strommashina Works in Bryansk. At the same time he attends a school for adults, where he is studying to enter a technical college. The heroism of the young defender of Brest Fortress is known to millions of Soviet people, who rightly think of him as "the Soviet Gavroche."

Petya Klipa's friend Volodya Kazmin, who went with him on his trek to the front-line, is also alive. He is now an engineer at the Pavlovsk municipal power station, Voronezh Region. Another friend of theirs, also one of the young defenders of the fortress, is now a senior lieutenant and serving on the Baltic coast.

Until very recently Raisa Abakumova, heroine of the fortress defence, was thought to be dead; then she was discovered working in the Kromi district hospital, Orel Region. Not far away, in the town of Mtsensk, her friend Valentina Rayevskaya, wounded on the first day of the war

Alexander Fil, 1956

by a German shell splinter, is a nurse at a hospital.

Many heroes of that legendary defence live and work in various parts of the Soviet Union. Anatoly Vinogradov, who as a senior lieutenant led a detachment in a breakthrough from the Central Island, is now a forge operator at a plant in Vologda. Senior Lieutenant of the Service Corps Alexander Semenenko, chief of staff of the combined group and comrade of Vasily Bitko, is a driver in the Ukrainian town of Nikolayev. Alexander Fil of the 84th Regiment, who fought with Fomin and Zubachov, is chief of a forest sector in the distant gold-fields of Yakutia. His army friend Alexander Rebzuev, a senior sergeant in the same regiment, is now headmaster of a village school in Velikiye-Luki Region.

Alexander Sanin, a former lieutenant of the 333rd Regiment, who with Potapov and Kizheva-

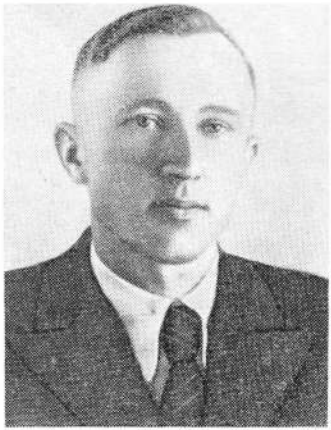
Alexander Pil, 2006

is a former shell splinter, a name of a hospital.

Many [illegible] letters. He did work in various parts of the Soviet Union. Anatoly Vinogradov, who as a senior lieutenant led a division over to a breakthrough from the Oxhöft Island, is now a large [illegible] of a plot in Volgograd. Senior Lieutenant of the Service Corps Alexander Stanislavov, chief of staff of the combined group and [illegible] of Vasily Bykov, is driven to the Ukrainian town of Nikolayev. Alexander Pil of the 84th Regiment, who fought with Franz and Zdanchuk, is chief of a forest settler in the distant gold-fields of Yakutia. His army friend Aleksandr Berezan, a senior sergeant in the same regiment, is now headmaster of a village school in Vorkuta-Ural Region.

Alexander Saint, a former lieutenant of the 62nd Regiment, now with Pokrovsk and Tolmachevo

tov commanded the men fighting in the area of the Terespolsky Gate, is a geography teacher at a school in Omsk. Ivan Bugakov, a comrade of Petya Klipa, afterwards one of the valiant Byelorussian partisans, is an electrician at a big state farm in Saratov Region. Dmitry Belomoin, a lieutenant of the 333rd Infantry Regiment, has become a major in the militia in the town of Petropavlovsk, Kazakhstan. Sergei Bobryonok of the ninth frontier post, who fought with Andrei Kizhevatov, is now an actor at the Zankovetska Theatre, Lvov.



Alexander Rebzuev, 1956

Modest, unassuming Soviet people, they worked in various fields of the country's socialist economy, foremost in labour just as they were once foremost in the defence of their country.

Everyone who took part in the immortal defence of Brest Fortress holds sacred the memory of those heroic and tragic days and their reminis-

Ivanov-Arsenin, 1938

for commanding the last fighting in the area of the Transpolaria Gate. It is a geography teacher at a school in Omsk. Ivan Bogdanov, a relative of Petya Vitya, afterwards one of the chief Bolshevik partisan leaders of the Volga-Ural farm in Siberia. Dmitry Borisovich, a lieutenant of the 330th Infantry Regiment, last Soviet to make contact with a unit in the area of Petropavlovsk-Kazakhstan. Semen Bobrovnik of the ninth Soviet tank army, was fought with André Klimentov, a tank officer of the Zaslavskaya Division, Lvov.

Modest, unassuming Soviet people, they worked in various fields of the country's economy, serving as fighters just as they were once foremost in the defense of their country.

Everyone who took part in the Leningrad defense of Brest Fortress holds sacred the memory of those heroic and tragic days and their comrade-

cences help us to establish more and more details of that great feat of arms accomplished by Soviet fighting men in the first months of the Great Patriotic War.

THEY FOUGHT ON THIS SOIL

On a bright summer day in 1954 several hundred people gathered in the central courtyard of Brest Fortress. Among them were townspeople from Brest, soldiers of the Brest garrison, young men in the first years of their service, who had been only boys during the war, and veteran officers with the orders and medals of Moscow and Stalingrad, Budapest, Vienna and Berlin on their tunics.

The crowd seated themselves on the grass in a big semicircle. Behind them was the bullet-scarred, half-ruined building of the fortress chapel, which had once been the garrison's club. It was a grim sight, this massive edifice with its slashed and battered walls, its gaping windows and ruined dome, which now lay in a pile of rubble with grass and bushes growing over it. On the left in a misshapen heap lay the ruins of the White Palace, on the right, at the junction of the Mukhavets and the Bug, could be seen the remains of the Terespolsky Gate and the red-brick circular barracks.

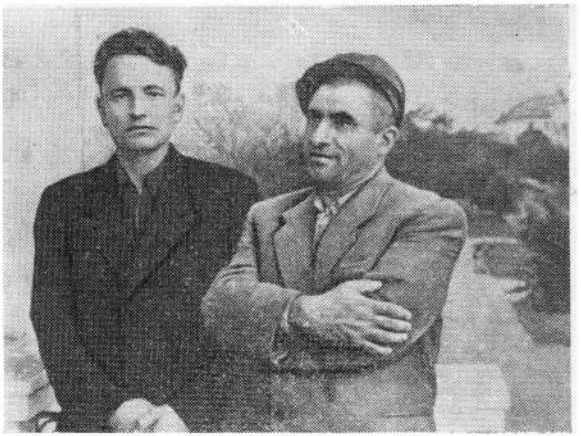
Benches and a long table were set up on the grass and a group of men and women took their seats there. These were the people who thirteen years previously had defended the fortress.

From distant Yerevan Samvel Matevosyan, former Y.C.L. secretary and Assistant Political Organizer of the 84th Regiment, had come to pay his respects to the ruined fortress. Three times he had shed his blood on these stones and many of his comrades were buried in this earth.

From Minsk, capital of Byelorussia, had come another participant in the defence, Lieutenant Alexander Makhnach, platoon commander of the 455th Infantry Regiment, now working as a journalist in Byelorussia. Like Matevosyan he, too, had fought and shed his blood on the walls of the fortress and had been seriously wounded by a Nazi agent disguised as a Soviet soldier, who shot him in the back.

Captain Shablovsky's daughter Tanya, a student at the local medical school, and the wives of officers Arshinov-Nikitin and Buligin, who had sheltered in the fortress cellars with their children, were also present.

With tears in their eyes, the gathering listened to the awe-inspiring story of what happened in the fortress in 1941. Matevosyan and Makhnach spoke of the feats of their comrades, of their heroism and determination in the unequal struggle,



Alexander Makhnach and Samvel Matevosyan in Brest, 1954

of their burning hatred of the enemy and their love for their Motherland which helped them to overcome the inhuman difficulties of that struggle. It was an impressive story and the young soldiers listened to it with stern and attentive faces, drawing a lesson from the heroic conduct of their fathers and elder brothers. Then, at their own request they were taken round the ruins by the defenders of the fortress.

"There used to be a room here where we put our wounded," said Makhnach, going up to the grass-

Abraham Vereshchak and Sergei Markovskii in Tiraspol, 1924.

of Holy Burning Bushes in the woods and their cry for help. Mother and Alesh helped them to overcome the inherent difficulties of that struggle. It was an impossible story and the young soldiers listened to it with alarm and attentive faces, drawing a lesson from the heroic exploits of their fathers and elder brothers. Then, at [illegible] meant they were taken under the care of the defenders of the fortress.

"Everything is over here, but there's no peace around," said Vereshchak, getting up to the grave

grown ruins of the north section of the barracks. "A German tank broke in and crushed them all," he added. The young soldiers listened with grim faces and their fists clenched as the terrible atrocities committed by the Nazi tankmen were mentioned.

Matevosyan led a large party of soldiers to the ruins of the White Palace, which he had once been entrusted to defend by Commissar Fomin. There was very little left of the palace except rubble, but in places the concrete outer wall with its thick iron railings was still intact.

They all gathered round one corner of the wall.

"We had a machine-gun here," said Matevosyan, "and it used to fire at the windows of the club, which the fascists were holding. I think you could probably find a lot of cartridge cases in the earth round here."

One of the soldiers brought a shovel and started digging. And indeed with every shovelful he dug up empty cartridge cases of Soviet machine-gun calibre, now green with age. But there was more here than cartridge cases. Something white showed among the loose earth and Matevosyan stooped quickly to pick it up. It was a fragment of a human skull, pierced almost through the centre with a jagged bullet hole. Matevosyan examined his discovery in silence, his face paled and the hand holding the skull shook slightly.

"One of our men," he said hoarsely. "The fascists buried theirs in the town."

He raised his head and looked at the soldiers crowding round him with tears in his eyes.

"There are a lot of them lying here, under these stones," he said with a tremour in his voice. "Remember them, comrades."

No one answered him, they all knew that words were not needed. But from the faces of the young soldiers one could tell that they would long remember the deeds of those unknown heroes of 1941, who had fallen in battle among the ruins of the old fortress, and that those deeds would always remain in their minds as an example of courage and patriotic devotion, to which they all felt themselves heirs.

As they made their way back to the waiting lorries, Sergeant-Major Boris Orlov, a long-service man who had been stationed in Brest for nearly ten years since the war, related how he had once met a former member of the garrison in the fortress.

It was in the summer of 1951 or 1952. A party of soldiers under Orlov's command was working in the western sector of Central Island, when a taxi drove across the bridge from the direction of the town. The taxi pulled up at the Kholmsky Gate and an officer stepped out. Removing his cap and glancing round, he walked slowly along

the barracks towards the Terespolsky Tower, not far from where Orlov's men were working.

The officer stopped by the ruins of the tower. He was a major, aged about forty, with noticeable streaks of grey in his dark hair, and stern clean-cut features. He had two rows of medals on his chest.

The major stood bareheaded staring at the pile of rubble and seemed not to notice the soldiers. The soldiers took no special notice of him either. Officers going to serve abroad or returning from foreign countries often filled in time while waiting for a train by coming to visit the fortress about which such astonishing stories were told. The soldiers had long been used to such visitors.

But what happened after that was quite unusual and could not fail to attract the men's attention. The unknown officer suddenly went down on his knees and pressed his chest to the dirty greyish-brown rubble, burying his face in his hands. And the soldiers heard the sound of his loud irrestrainable sobbing.

The sergeant-major and two of his men immediately went up to the officer.

"What is it, Comrade Major?" Orlov asked sympathetically.

The major gave a start and looked round. At the sight of the soldiers he recovered himself and rose to his feet. His face was wet with tears and

there was a deep line of sorrow between his heavy brows.

"We fought here in forty one," he replied briefly.

The soldiers regarded the major with sympathy and curiosity, as though expecting him to speak of those memorable days. But the major said nothing more. He stood for a few minutes, wiped his eyes with a handkerchief, then saluted the sergeant-major and his men, and went back to his car.

"I wanted to ask his name, but I couldn't somehow," said Orlov. "He was so upset."

"There may be more of them alive than we know," said one of the officers thoughtfully. "They're probably scattered all over the country...."

The officer was right. In 1957, over two hundred former defenders of the fortress, who live in towns and villages of the Soviet Union, from Brest to Magadan and from Murmansk to Yerevan, have become known to the public.

Nearly two years have passed since that gathering was held in the fortress. In July 1956 the Soviet people celebrated the fifteenth anniversary of the defence of Brest Fortress. Several of the fortress's wartime defenders came to Moscow to attend an evening held in honour of the occasion.

The meetings that took place at the hotel of the Central House of the Soviet Army were deeply

Defenders of Brest Fortress in Moscow. Left to right: Pyotr Koshkarov, Samvel Matevosyan, F. Zabirko, Konstantin Kasatkin, Pyotr Klipa

moving. The commander of the East Fort Pyotr Gavrilov met his former chief of staff, Captain Konstantin Kasatkin, now an engineer at a Yaroslavl factory. He also met Raisa Abakumova and his former regimental comrade Alexander

Defenders of Brest Fortress in Museum. Left to right: Pyotr Klochkov, Sacred Abdurakhmanov, P. Zaitsev, Konstantin Zheltikov, Fyodor Eliseyev

serving. The commander of the East Fort Pyotr Gavrilov met his former chief of staff, Captain Konstantin Zheltikov, now an engineer at a technical factory. He also met Police Motorcyclist and his former regimental comrade Alexander

Semenenko. Semenenko himself wept when he embraced his old friend Nikolai Zorikov, a regimental quartermaster, who lost his arm during the defence, and had now come to Moscow from Kalinin Region. Petya Klipa met one of his regimental comrades, Mikhail Gurevich, who now plays in the Minsk Philharmonic Orchestra. Lieutenant Anatoly Vinogradov, now a Vologda forge operator, and Political Organizer Pyotr Koshkarov, now a Moscow garage manager, ran to meet each other with a shout of joy. Samvel Matevosyan warmly embraced the son of his late commissar, Yury Fomin, a young barrister from Kiev.

The participants in the heroic defence appeared on Moscow television, visited the army units and enterprises of the capital, and everywhere were warmly received by the people of Moscow. Then the evening of celebration was held in the Red Banner Hall of the Central House of the Soviet Army, attended by hundreds of Muscovites, generals, officers and men of the Soviet Army.

A few days later a group of ex-defenders visited the fortress. On the way Gavrilov, Matevosyan, Klipa, Abakumova and Vinogradov were joined by Alexander Makhnach, Fyodor Zhuravlyov, Mikhail Gurevich and Alexander Petlitsky, who now live in Minsk.

It was a wet, gloomy morning when the train

Defenders visit the fortress

steamed into Brest Station, but hundreds of townspeople turned out with flowers and a brass band to welcome their guests. The people of Brest greeted their heroes as their dearest friends. Among the crowd were other defenders of the fortress, now living in Brest Region: Yakov Kolomiets, one of the lieutenants who defended the East Fort; ranker Grigory Gudim of the 44th Regiment; Mark Piskun, an ex-signaller, now chairman of a prosperous collective farm; the wife and son of the late Captain Zubachov; the wife and daughter of the heroic Nikolai Nesterchuk, and the

Liberation Mill, the Harvest

shipment into Brest Station. Hundreds of Soviet people turned out with flowers and a brass band to welcome their guests. The people of Brest greeted their liberators as they disembarked. Among the crowd were other defenders of the fortress, now living in Brest Region: Yekim Kobrinets, one of the fortress's who defended the East Fort; Fedor Grigor'yevich Gusak of the 44th Regiment; Mark Pavlov, an ex-signaller, now chairman of a prosperous collective farm; the wife and son of the late Captain Zubachev, the wife and daughter of the hero Nikolai Masterkov; and the

On the ruins

families of other officers who died bravely in the fighting. It was an unforgettable occasion. On the same day the defenders and the families of the fallen heroes visited the fortress. Deeply moved, they entered the fortress gates in solemn silence, carrying large bunches of flowers, which they scattered on the ruins where their comrades had died. The wife and son of Captain Zubachov were first to lay their bunches of flowers on the roof of the cellar where the captain had had his headquarters. Samvel Matevosyan placed his flowers carefully at the foot of the wall where the fascists shot Regimental Commissar Fomin. Ne-

Cy Sebring

families of other officers who died travels in the fighting. It was an unforgettable occasion. On the same day the deliverers and the families of the fallen became friends for life. Deeply moved, they entered the fortress gates in solemn silence, carrying large bouquets of flowers, which they strewed on the graves where their comrades had died. The wife and sister of Captain Arbuckle were lead to the large Irish harmless of flowers on the roof of the cellar where the corpses had been laid by headquarters. Samuel Nathaniel placed his flowers carefully at the foot of the roof, where the features that Regimental Commissar Peter Mc-

sterchuk's daughter Lida, who had been with her father in the difficult days of the siege, wept as she laid her flowers on the spot where he had died.

Two days later a meeting of ten thousand people of Brest was held at the city stadium. The heroes were greeted with tumultuous cheering and applause, flowers showered down on them and many heartfelt speeches were made. Replying from the platform, they said that this town and its old fortress where they had shed their blood, and their comrades had died, would always remain dear and sacred to them.

The next morning there were many people about in the quiet green garrison cemetery that borders on the outer wall of the fortress. Here there is a common grave, where the remains of scores of nameless heroes whose bones were found during clearance work are buried.

The defenders came to pay homage at this grave. A large wreath was lowered slowly on to the earthen mound and careful hands arranged the red ribbon with its inscription: "To our brothers-in-arms who died like heroes from those who defended the fortress with them."

The same day the people of Brest gave their guests a warm send-off.

Some months passed and yet another welcome guest came to visit the Fortress of Brest. Rodion

Defenders of Brest Fortress lay flowers at the foot of the wall where the Nazis shot Regimental Commissar Fomin

Semenyuk, a worker at the Kemerovo Iron and Steel Mills, formerly a junior sergeant in the 393rd Independent Anti-Aircraft Battalion, arrived from distant Siberia. It was he who had been charged with the keeping of the battalion's battle banner. Not long before the fort fell, he had buried it in one of the chambers under the fortifications, and now Rodion Semenyuk had come to find the hidden banner.

Rodion Semenyuk with the banner of the 393rd Anti-Aircraft Battalion

Taut with excitement, he walked to the East Fort, straining his memory to recall the chamber where he had buried the precious banner. And when he tapped his foot on the ground and said with a quiver in his voice: "It's here!" everyone who was with him felt their hearts beat faster.

Semenyuk took the shovel himself. And as soon as the blade struck something metallic he knew that he had not been mistaken. It was the metal pail in which he had hidden the banner.

In fifteen years the pail had rusted and brok-

Szczypek, a worker at the Kharkov Iron and Steel Mills, formerly a junior sergeant in the 106th Independent Anti-Aircraft Battalion, arrived from distant Siberia. It was he who just here charged with the burning of the battalion's battle banner. Not long before the terrible incident he had buried it in one of the chambers under the fortifications, and now Rodion Szczypek had come to find the hidden banner.

Rodion Szczypek with the banner of the 106th Anti-Aircraft Battalion

Last night, unobserved, he walked to the East Fort, straining his memory to recall the chamber where he had buried the precious banner. And when he tapped his foot on the ground and said with a delight to his wife, "It's here!" everyone who was with him let their hearts beat faster.

Szczypek took his sacred bundle. And as soon as the Nazis struck something metallic he knew that he had not been mistaken. It was the metal pail in which he had hidden the banner.

In fifteen years the pail had rusted and bent

en into holes, and as he lifted it out of the earth he wondered anxiously what had happened to the banner. Carefully he drew out the canvas bucket. It, too, fell to pieces in his hands. The tarpaulin in which the banner was wrapped was also in a fragile state. With trembling fingers he tore it away.

The banner was intact and quite unspoiled by age. Semenyuk unfolded it in front of everyone and the golden letters gleamed on the scarlet velvet:

"Workers of all countries, unite!"

And below it:

"393rd Independent Anti-Aircraft Battalion."

The troops formed up solemnly in the fortress courtyard. The standard-bearer and his assistants marched smartly past and the scarlet banner unfurled behind them in the breeze. And behind this banner another banner moved past the ranks, a banner without a pole. A tall figure in civilian clothes carried it carefully on his outstretched arms and the silent ranks paid homage to this glorious banner of the heroes of Brest Fortress, a banner that had flown amid the smoke of fierce battles for the Motherland, a banner carried by the man who had fought with it wrapped round his breast and preserved it for posterity.

The banner that Junior Sergeant Rodion Se-

menyuk had saved was presented to the Museum of the Heroic Defence of the Fortress of Brest, which was opened in a part of the old barracks of Central Island on November 8, 1956, during the celebration of the 39th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. Its rooms contain hundreds of exhibits: weapons and documents found under the ruins of the fortress, numerous photographs of the defenders, paintings dedicated to the epic struggle, and many articles and books on the subject.

Every day there are many visitors who come to see the exhibition and inspect the ruins. Excursion trips from Brest and other towns are frequent.

Brest is the gateway to the Soviet Union, its door leading to Western Europe. Many trains pass through it every day, carrying passengers to and fro across the frontier. Scores of foreign delegations enter the U.S.S.R. through Brest.

And everyone who stops at Brest Station for even a little while hurries to visit the famous fortress and its museum and pay his respects to the ruins. The achievement of the heroes of Brest Fortress has become famous throughout the world and it will go down as one of the greatest feats of military valour in the history of man.

This feat has received high recognition from the Soviet people and the Soviet Government. At the

beginning of 1957, by decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., one of the leaders of the defence of Brest Fortress, Pyotr Gavrilov, was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. Regimental Commissar Fomin, commander of the garrison of the Central Fortress, was posthumously awared the Order of Lenin; the fallen heroes Captain I. Zubachov, Captain V. Shablovsky, Senior Political Organizer N. Nesterchuk and Lieutenant A. Naganov received posthumously the Order of the Patriotic War, First Class. S. Matevosyan, R. Abakumova, A. Vinogradov, P. Koshkarov, P. Semenyuk and other glorious defenders of the fortress were decorated with the Order of the Red Banner, and many others received various orders and medals.

The Soviet Land will never forget the glorious and patriotic deeds of its defenders. The Soviet people pays them due tribute and the youth of the Soviet country learn from their example of selfless courage and iron endurance in the struggle for the cause of communism.

TO THE READER

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and men who had fought their way out of encirclement, and from the bomber crews making night raids into enemy-held territory, who in the region of Brest saw explosions and the glittering trails of tracer bullets in the darkness below them. German staff papers captured in later battles contained the following admission: "The Russians in Brest-Litovsk fought with exceptional stubbornness and determination, they displayed superb infantry training and a splendid will to resist."

In this book Sergei Smirnov, who spent many years in a tireless search for information about the immortal garrison, tells the story of the heroes of Brest Fortress who, though completely cut off from their own forces, fought to their last cartridge, their last breath without surrender.